Clarity

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/14118777.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Jimmy Price/Brian Zeller, Will Graham & Beverly Katz
Characters:	Will Graham, Will Graham's Dogs, Jack Crawford, Hannibal Lecter, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller, Beverly Katz, Alana Bloom, Abigail Hobbs, Freddie Lounds, Franklyn Froideveaux, Tobias Budge, Mrs. Komeda (Hannibal), Dr. Frederick Chilton, Abel Gideon
Additional Tags:	Autistic Will Graham, Jack is kind of a dick, What else is new, Flirty Hannibal, Slow Burn, ? - Freeform, i think, If I can control myself, Will has cats, and more dogs, Will has an ESA, Follows canon pretty close until around chapter 3, Will and Beverly are Best Friends, they have sleepovers, My First Work in This Fandom, my first work ever, Wow, Beverly Katz is Gay, Will can read emotions really well, Will Knows, Dark Will, Cannibalism, as usual, Recreational Drug Use, Drinking, video games - Freeform, Pet Shinnanigans, Will wouldn't know romantic interest if it hit him in the face, Hannibal Loves Will, he doesnt love dogs, Sharing a Bed, Platonically, ;), hand holding, also platonic - Freeform, More platonic things, like adoption, The Room, family trauma, Sarcasm, Sass, All things expected from Hannibal, Animal Abuse, but they save him!!, First Dates, Kitty pocket coat, Gift Giving, Kissing, Sleepwalking, Fluff, Eventual Smut, Non-Consensual Drug Use, Possessive Will, Possessive Hannibal, Shower Sex, First Time, Jealousy, Misunderstandings, Murder Family, Hannibal is a dick too, Mental Health Issues, Will Graham Has Encephalitis, Someone Help Will Graham, Yes you Beverly
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2018-03-27 Updated: 2018-08-02 Words: 90,215 Chapters: 11/?

Clarity

by phantomhound

Summary

What if Will wasn't so horrified by his potential as a killer, but rather never commited the crime because he never had a good enough motive?

He smiled, tight lipped. He was wearing a mask, Will could see it. What did the Good Doctor have to hide?

This series will essentially be a what-if rewrite of Hannibal, from Will's point of view.

Notes

I DO NOT OWN ANYTHING BUT THE OC ANIMALS

See the end of the work for more notes

Apertif

Will saw Jack coming into his class from the corner of his eye. He clenched his teeth, and tried desperately to put his laptop away faster and pretend like he didn't see or hear the man coming to talk to him. Will kept his eyes glued to the floor, and was about to round his desk and leave, but was stopped before he could escape.

“Mr. Graham.”

Will hurriedly put his glasses on to shield himself and mentally prepared himself for the inevitable.

“Special Agent Jack Crawford, I head the Behavioral Science Unit.”

“We’ve met.” Will remembered the last interaction he had with the man- it didn't go well. Will did not want a repeat.

“Yes,” Jack paused. “We had a disagreement, when we opened up the museum.”

Will tried to scan for escape routes, wanting this to be over. “I disagreed with what you named it.” He bit his tongue from being too coarse, that never helped anything and usually made socializing even worse than it already was. He searched for something not too bad to say, something that could make his exit a bit easier- “Why are you here anyway?” Direct, but rude. He had to work on that.

“I understand you hitched your horse to a teaching post. I also understand it's difficult for you to be sociable.”

“Yes well, autism does that to you. I’m just talking at them I’m not listening to them it's not social.”

“I see.” Jack reached his hand up. “May I?”

Will bit his tongue as Jack adjusted his glasses from where he had perched them specifically to avoid eye contact. Maybe he would be blunt and rude, this man deserved it.

“So the spectrum places you closer to autism than sociopaths or narcissists?”

“I don't do the kind of work you’re asking me to do anymore Jack.”

“But you can empathize with narcissists and sociopaths-”

“I can empathize with anyone, it's less a personality disorder than an overactive imagination.” He slung his bag over his shoulder and began to walk out.

“Please, Will. There are eight girls missing, all in the past eight months.” Will stopped. “Let me borrow your imagination.”

“I thought there were seven?”

“There were.”

“When did you tag the eighth?”

“About three minutes before I walked into your lecture hall”

Damn empathy.

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“So you’re calling these abductions because there are no bodies?” Will asked as he struggled to keep up with Jacks pace.

“No bodies, no parts of bodies, nothing that comes out of bodies.” Will could feel the anger and tension radiating off the man in front of him, and tried to keep himself from being too nervous.

“Well then those girls weren’t taken from where you think they were taken.” He stated, slightly out of beath. He was already regretting this. Next thing he knew, Jack was gonna be forcing him to see a psychiatrist and then locking him in The Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

“Then where were they taken from?”

“I don’t know, someplace else.”

Will thought that next time he interacted with this man he would want Phantom with him.

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“All of them were abducted on a friday so they wouldn’t have to be reported missing until monday. However he's covering his tracks, he needs a weekend to do it.”

Kidnapping 101. Take your victims when they won't be reported missing for as long as you can ensure. He mused at how easy it would be to take himself, he didn’t have anyone to miss him but his students and zoo. He looked at the girls and the map, and Jack handed him another photograph.

“Number Eight?”

“Elise Nichols. Saint Cloud State on the Mississippi. Disappeared on friday, was supposed to house sit for her parents, feed the cat-.” *Maybe if Jack forces me to interview the parents I*

can just sit with the cat. “She never made it home.” *Hungry cat.*

“One through seven are dead, don’t you think? He’s not keeping them around. He gets a new one.”

“So we focus on Elise Nichols.”

Why the hell do you need me here I know you knew that. Will looked up at the board. “They’re all very, uhm, Mall of America. They’re easier to catch when they have a type.” *So why do you need me.*

“Same hair color, same eye color, roughly the same age, same height, same weight. So what is it about all these girls?”

He was sure Jack was patronizing him now. This was basic stuff. “It's not about all these girls, it's about one of them. He’s like Willy Wonka, every girl he takes is a candy bar-and hidden in amongst all those candy bars is the one true intended victim, our proverbial golden ticket.”

“So is he warming up for his golden ticket, or relieving what he's done to her?”

Harder questions. “Well, she wouldn't be the first taken, and she wouldn't be the last. He would want to hide how special he is, I would, wouldn’t you?” Will doubted that would freak Jack enough to get him to leave *him the fuck alone* but it was worth a shot. He was definitely bringing Phantom with him tomorrow, a privilege normally reserved only for finals or other stressful teaching periods. Maybe that could scare Jack away.

“I want you to get closer to this.” *Fuck.*

“No, you have Heimlich at Harvard and Bloom at Georgetown. They do the same thing I do and they don't get screwed up doing it.”

“That's not exactly true is it? They don’t do the same thing as you. You have a very specific way of thinking about things.”

“Has there been a lot of discussion about the uh, specific way I think?” *More rumors and whispers.*

“You make jumps you can't explain Will.”

“No, no, the evidence explains. It's as simple as figuring out what you would do next if you were them, it's not something I like doing.” He could feel himself getting worked up.

“Then help me find some evidence. Please, there are girls dying.”

He considered it, knowing it would haunt him forever if he didnt. “That may require me to be sociable.”

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He went into Elise Nichols house, Jack leading the way. He wished he could have stopped by home, but sadly Wolf Trap was the opposite direction from Minnesota, and a plane flight away now, and so he would not have any furry support today.

He was only half listening as Jack talked to the family. They were distressed, their kid was gone for christs sake, but he knew he would only do more harm than good if he talked to them any more than was necessary. The mother obviously had more of a sense of reality about her than the father. He hoped if he had to deal with either of them it would be her.

“How's the cat?” He spoke up, interrupting somebody but he wasn’t paying enough attention to know who.

“What?”

“How's your cat? Elise was supposed to feed him? Was the cat weird when you came hom? Must have been hungry, not being fed all weekend.” His were screaming if he missed their feeding by a few minutes.

“We didn’t notice.” *The bowl wasn’t empty. Probably not a picky cat then.*

“Would you give us a moment please?” Jack motioned for Will to come over and talk to him.

“He took her from here.”

“What?”

“She got on a train, she came home, fed the cat, and then he took her.” He felt slightly sick.

He listened as Jack declared it a crime scene, calling in an ERT. He braced himself for the parents to freak out.

“Why is it now a crime scene?” the father demanded.

“Can I see your daughters room?” Best not to engage, just see.

“The police were up there this morning.” Will noticed the cat pawing at the door. Could feel the distress coming off it in waves. The mourning. It knew, but something was off.

He stopped his hand from touching the door. “I’ll get that. Mr.Nichols please put your hands in your pockets and refrain from touching anything.”

“We’ve been in and out of here all day.”

Oh god. “You can hold the cat if it's easier.”

The door swung open to reveal pale white Elise laying on her bed, peaceful. Dead.

“Elise…”

“I need you to leave the room.” Will stopped him with his body, as was necessary. The cat dropped to the ground. Will started to feel overwhelmed, Jack coming in and escorting him out. The cat was taken away as well, and Jack left him to do what he did best. He closed his eyes.

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He felt her pulse beneath his fingers, his hands steady around her neck, choking, ripping the life out of her. She struggled for breath, tried to scream. This was merciful. This wasn’t murder. It was necessary. He watched the life fade from her eyes-

“You’re Will Graham.”

Will snapped from his haze, mildly panicking. “You’re not supposed to be in here.” He tried to calm his breathing. *This is why I went through the trouble to get myself an ESA.*

“You wrote the ‘Standard Monogram of Time of Death by Insect Activity.’” He didn’t say anything, why was she here? “Found antler velvet in two of the wounds.” *Antler velvet?* “What were you doing? I was worried you might be having some kind of seizure.” She took a couple steps forward. He took a step back. “You, uh, not real FBI?”

“I’m a, uh, Special Investigator.”

Her brows shot up with a smile. “Never been an FBI Agent?” She seemed more impressed. She seemed… tolerable.

“Strict screening process.” He relaxed a tad, fumbling for his glasses.

“Detects instability.” Her brows furrowed. “You unstable?” Curiosity poured off her in waves, but he couldn't sense any sort of malicious intent. She seemed more like a fascinated child, wanting to make friends with the new interesting thing she found. There was also some concern, but she didn't seem worried about what he may do. He chanced a glance into her eyes. She was concerned about his mental state.

“Now you know you’re not supposed to be in here.” As if she could tell eye contact from him was a rare thing, she held his gaze. Didn’t push when he glanced away either. His lips quirked up at the corners. He hoped that shed be the only person other than Jack he’d have to deal with on this case.

“I found antler velvet in two of the wounds, like she was gored. I was looking for velvet in the other wounds when I was interrupted.” She said the words with a smile, purposefully direct at Will. She knew about his condition, had dealt with people like that before. She was

trying to reassure him that she was a friend. He smiled briefly. If she knew about that, she probably would act as a shield from Jack. he liked that idea.

“Hold on, excuse me, Look-” Oh no there were others. “Deer and Elk pin their prey. They put all their weight into their antler try and suffocate a victim, that's how they'd kill, like, a fox or coyote.”

No, no, no.

“Alright Elise Nichols was strangled, suffocated, her ribs are broken.”

“Antler velvet is rich in nutrients it actually promotes healing, he may have put it there on purpose.” He didn’t like this guy, he got it all wrong.

“You think he was trying to heal her?”

“He wanted to undo, as much as he could, given that he’d already killed her.” He also argued with Will when he was right. He was loud, abrasive, he didn’t like it.

“He put her back where he found her.”

It clicked. “Whatever he did to the others he couldn’t do it to her.”

“Is this his golden ticket?”

“No. This is an apology.” Guilt, staggering guilt. That's what he felt when he looked at Elise.

The others looked at each other, now with more caution and fear when they looked at him. *So much for friends.*

“ Does anybody have an aspirin?”

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He boarded his flight home, and picked his car up from where he left it at the airport. As he drove along the street that led to his house, he spotted a stray.

A rope was tied around the poor dogs neck, the dog a mutt of some kind. It looked labrador or retriever esk, but obviously had some chow or even australian shepherd in it from what he could tell in the dark. With some coaxing and homemade treats, he had the dog in the back of his car on the way home to a bath. He hoped the boy liked other dogs and cats.

He gave the dog a bath, and dubbed it Winston. It was surprisingly tolerant, the colder weather forcing him to heat the water on the stove and blow dry the dog.

He introduced it to the rest of his dog pack. Zoe and Max gave a couple yips, but he silenced them easily. Phantom, his big black and brown Caucasian Shepherd trotted to the kennel with Winston and touched noses, sniffing and wagging his tail. Phantom was his Emotional Support Animal, one that he had gone through alot off trouble to be certified and to get the

paperwork in that said he needed one. It made his life a lot easier, the big fluffy animal always calm and happy when he needed to be, and scared off many potential socializers.

Buster leapt into his lap and he scratched Cookie behind the ears.

“You’re coming with me to work tomorrow Phantom.” The dog gave a gentle woof and settled by his feet, it's protective nature very useful in many situations. Phantom was gentle, but very dangerous if he felt Will was threatened. Or if Will gave the command.

He herded them inside a few minutes later, feeding them all and feeding Winston in the spare room he had for acclimatizing new strays. Then he headed upstairs. He came to his set up for his cats, the two baby gates ensure no unwanted dogs would break in and distress his feline friends. He removed the top baby gate, and stepped over the other, putting the top one back in place with a small window. Upstairs was for his cats when a new stray came in. Hearing the gates, the nine little lions bolted out, promptly screaming at him for food. He took out his homemade cat food, and waded to the room with the bowls and fed them.

He watched Maroomba finish eating and immediately go bolting off to eat whatever he could find on the floor that the other cats threw out of their dishes. The auburn red color and this behavior what earned the silly cat his name. Sometimes he was faster than the dogs at picking up scraps. He gave a whistle when Allie was done eating, the cat running up the cat tree and scampering onto his shoulders, and he left upstairs again to go down and introduce Winston to her, the calmest of the cats.

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He bolted upright in bed, the clock reading 3:27 am. He was sweating, and the cats paced around his feet and head crying. He felt Cookie and Phantom nuzzleing at his hand, and sighed as Phantom pulled himself onto the bed, the cats scattering. Winston followed suit, having virtually no reaction to the cats had allowed him free reign of the house. Will pulled his clothes off, drying off with a towel and not bothering to put on dry clothes, pulling towels over himself and resigning to shiver and be cold for the rest of the night. Ish. He couldn't really with the furry animals piling on top of him and comforting him, lulling him quickly back to sleep.

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Will dunked his head in the bathroom sink, feeling blood flood in around him, filling his mouth, suffocating him- he pulled his head out and dried his hands and face, Phantom whined and pawed at his upper leg. He couldn’t deny that the very reason he chose his biggest dog to

wear the red vest was purely so people would be intimidated and leave him alone, or he could just hide behind the 180 pound mass of muscle and comfort.

Phantom woofing and footsteps were the only warning he got before Jack came in.

“What are you doing in here?”

He sighed. “I enjoy the smell of urinal cake.”

“Me too. Let's talk.” Another agent came in, unzipping his pants- “ *Use the ladies room!* ”- Zipping up his pants, leaving. Phantom growled warningly, standing in front of Will.

“Heel boy.” He tangled his hand in the fur on the dogs neck, grounding himself.

“You respect my judgement Will?”

“Mmhmm. Yes.” Phantom sat, staring Jack down.

“Good, because we will stand a better chance at catching this guy with you in the saddle.”

“I’m in the saddle, I’m just uhm, confused as to which direction I’m being pointed.” He rubbed at Phantoms neck feeling himself get worked up. “I-I don’t know this kind of psychopath I’ve never read about him. I don’t even know if he’s a psychopath he's not insensitive, he’s not shallow-” Phantom whined and Will scratched at his ears.

“You know something about him. Otherwise you wouldn’t have said ‘this is an apology.’ What is he apologizing for?” Another distressed sound came from the dog as Will removed his hand and began to pace.

“He couldn’t honor her. He feels bad.” Will pulled at his hair, becoming more distressed as Jack raised his voice.

“Well feeling bad defeats the purpose of being a psychopath, doesn’t it?” Jack took a step closer.

“Yes! It does!” Will backed himself against the sink, voice trembling. He didn’t like nor was he used to this kind of treatment.

“Then what kind of crazy is he?” Jack shouted. Phantom stood and gave a low bark. “Sorry.” He lowered it and took a step back, putting some space between him and the growling hound that was staring him down.

“He couldn’t… show her, he loved her, so he put her back where he killed her. Whatever kind of crazy that is.” Will walked away from Jack, more towards the entrance, and Phantom followed.

“You think he loves these girls?” Jack sounded disgusted. Will couldn’t blame him.

“He loves one of them. And- and yes, I think by association he has some form of love for the others.” His pacing continued, and he looked away from Jack. He felt like he was gonna have

a breakdown.

“There was no semen, there was no saliva, Elise Nichols died a virgin, she stayed that way!”

“ That's not how he's loving them!” Will cried, horrified. “He wouldn’t disrespect them that way!” Phantom whined and nudged Wills hand. “He doesn’t want these girls to suffer he kills them quickly, and-” Phantom leaned into his side, huffing. Will breathed. “-To his thinking, with mercy.” *Like Dad swatting me to learn a lesson so I wouldn’t learn it harder latter on.*

“Sensitive psychopath. Risked getting caught, so he could tuck Elise Nichols back into bed.”

A shameless devotion, regardless of self preservation. Like a lover. Or, like a parent. “He has to take the next girl soon.” Phantom sat back down, on one of his feet. “ He *knows* , he’s gonna get caught. One way or the other.”

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Will couldn’t deny the awkwardness of the air in the room. These three were obviously a well oiled team, and were very familiar with each other. Beverly, he learned her name was, was doing her best to shield and include him in the more social aspects while they worked, and he greatly appreciated that.

“My sister. She's on the spectrum. I don’t wanna sound patronizing, but i want to let you know that you always have a safe space. Just let me know and I’ll help you pull back.”

He really appreciated her.

“Ok, I tried her skin for prints- of course nothing. But we did get a hand spread off her neck.” Price started off, as they stood around the metal table.

“Reports say anything about nails?” Wills brows furrowed.

“Fingernails were smudged when we took the scrapings. Smudges were from her own palms when she scratched them, she never scratched him.” Will felt the urge to snap at Zeller that those were not the nails she was talking about.

“Piece of metal is all we got..”

Phantom laid back and sighed from where he was by the door, not straying his post, where he couldn’t contaminate anything, unless Will became too distressed. “We should be looking at plumbers, steamfitters, toolworkers…” The room faded off into silence as he stared into the dark of he body bag, zoning out into a nightmarish reality. He saw her, gored and bloody.

“-Post-mortem,” Will snapped back to himself, the truth to clear in his eyes. “-So, not gored.” Zeller had a twinge of sass to him. He supposed the entire team of them did.

“She has lots of piercings that look like they were caused by deer antlers. I didn't say the deer was responsible for putting them there.”

“She was mounted on them. Like hooks.” He stared blankly at a point beyond the body. He knew he just cemented his place in their minds as a freak. “She may have been bled.” He shifted his gaze to appear more in touch with reality, less insane. He didn’t know if it helped.

“Her liver was removed.” Zeller said, despite Wills crisis. Maybe they didn't mind. “Yeah, see that? He took it out, and he put it back in.”

“Huh. Why would he cut it out if he was just gonna sew it back in again.”

Another disturbing clarity. “Something wrong with the meat.” They all looked at him.

“She had liver cancer.”

“He’s, uhm, He’s eating them.” He shifted his face away, going back to Phantom to sit out. He could hear them keep talking, letting him wind down. A while later Beverly came back to sit beside him. “Do you need a ride home?”

“Hmm?”

“I’m asking if you’re okay to drive. I don't mind picking you up tomorrow too, to get your car.”

“I- I live in Wolf Trap.”

“No way, I live in Reston! Maybe we could have a sleepover?”

“I’m, uhm, I’m okay to drive thank you. Not smart to sleep with coworkers. Especially the ones you actually like.” She gave a laugh as he stood up and leashed Phantom, turning to go out the door.

“I meant like a couple of teenage girls, I never got those when i was younger. Don't think you did either.”

“No, I didn’t. Moved around too much for any friends and I don’t think dad would have taken well to me pillow fighting and gossiping with teenage girls.” She laughed.

“My dad didn’t take well to the sleepovers I liked having with girls either.” He looked at her and she winked. “See you later, Will.”

He was left alone in the lab, only his dog beside him, and he smiled. Maybe he’d get a friend out of this after all.

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Will didn’t like psychiatrists. They saw too much of him, and therapy didn’t work on him anyway. Dogs and whiskey did. He only half listened as Jack caught Doctor Lecter up on the case, absentmindedly petting Phantom. Phantom seemed as uneasy as he felt, eyes never leaving the Doctor as he walked around the room.

As Freddie Lounds was brought up, Will wrinkled his nose. “Tasteless.”

“Do you have trouble with taste?”

Oh god here we go. “My thoughts are often not tasty.”

“Nor mine. No effective barriers.” The Doctor had a thickly accented voice, but Will couldn’t place it.

“I build forts.”

“Associations clome quickly.”

“So do forts.” Will had to stop himself from snapping too hard. He didn’t want Jack to reprimand him and make Phantom freak out again. Jack may force him to exchange him out for another one if he did. He imagined Buster trying to fight Jack and fought the urge to smile.

“Not fond of eye contact, are you?”

Some psychiatrist, everything about him screamed that he was on the spectrum, especially his dog. “Eye are distracting. You see too much, you don’t see enough.” He turned to him, a bit ticked off. “And it's hard to focus when you’re thinking, ‘oh those whites are really white,’ or, ‘he must have hepatitis,’ or, ‘is that a burst vein?’” His hand tightened in his dogs fur as he met Doctor Lecter's eyes head on. “So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible.” He turned back to face Jack, breaking eye contact. Oddly enough, Doctor Lecter found him charming. “Jack?”

“Yes?” Will was about to point out a detail he had spotted in the case, when Doctor Lecter spoke again.

“I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for those you love. So you keep human presence out with companions who won't understand human morals and accept you regardless.”

Will stopped and looked at him again. He had a feeling the Doctor wasn’t here for this case. “Whose profile are you working on- Whose profile is he working on?” Will was angry, and rightfully so. He had not consented to any of this. Phantom gave off a worried whine, trying to soothe him.

“I’m sorry Will, observing is what we do, I can't turn mine off any more than you can turn off yours.”

Will dropped his voice, his hackles rising. “Please, don’t psychoanalyze me. You wouldn’t like me when I'm psychoanalyzed.” He stood from his seat, taking Phantoms leash in hand.

“Will.”

“Now, if you’ll excuse me I have to go give a lecture. On psychoanalyzing.” He left the room, still bristling.

Will didn’t like psychiatrists.

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Will was shocked to see the girl in the field. This wasn’t the shrike, he knew immediately. Phantom barked from where he was, secured to the car. Will hated leaving him there but it wasn’t like it was hot and he could run a bit around the car from where his leash was secured, it was far enough from the scene he could leave the doors open while still being able to hear him.

“Stag head was reported stolen about a mile from here.”

“Just the head?” He asked distantly.

“Minneapolis homicides already made a statement. They're calling him the minnesota shrike.”

“Like the bird?” Will saw Price stand up with Zeller, and knew he was about to know more about birds. Price knew way too much about obscure animals.

“Shrikes a perching bird.” *Yep.* “Impales mice and lizards on thorny branches and barbed wire. Rips their organs right out of their bodies, and puts them in a little birdie pantry, and eats them later.”

“Can’t tell whether it's sloppy, or shrewd.”Jack commented.

“He wanted her found this way.” Will took a few steps forward, this killers design so familiar but so far away. He’d seen this work before, but not from Elise Nichols killer. “It's, It's petulant. I almost feel like he's mocking her.” *Like a pig.* “Or he’s mocking us.”

“Where did all his love go.”

“Whoever tucked Elise Nichols back into bed didn’t paint this picture.” The world was greying out, he could feel her pain, hear her screaming-

“He took her lungs.” The trembling voice of Zeller brought him back. “I’m pretty sure she was alive when he cut them out.”

Will was more horrified he wasn't feeling sick then anything else. "Our cannibal loves women. He doesn't want to destroy them, he wants to consume them. Keep some part of them inside." The pieces started the fall together after that. "This girls killer thought she was a pig."

"You think this is a copycat?" Jack asked him as he started to head back to his car.

"The cannibal who killed Elise Nichols had a place to do it and no interest in- "he started intently at the scene, " -In *field kabuki* . So, he has a house, or two, or a-a cabin, something, with an antler room. " He thought. *Parent-like lack of self-preservation.* "He has a daughter. Same age as the other girls, same eye color, same hair, same height same weight. She's an only child. She's leaving home. He can't stand the thought of losing her. She's his golden ticket."

"What about the copycat?" Will almost rolled his eyes.

"You know an intelligent psychopath, particularly a sadist, is very hard to catch. There will be no motive, no traceable patterns, he may never kill this way again. Have Doctor Lecter draw up his psychological profile, you seem very impressed with his opinion." He regretted the snide remark, but damn if it didn't make him feel a little better.

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It was a little hard to find a hotel to accommodate his dog, but Jack assisted him in finding a good place to stay. The water ran hot over his body, and he let his mind wander. Hoofs clacked outside the shower, and he startled suddenly as a large black mass pushed back the curtain to climb in with him. He calmed a bit when he noticed it was just Phantom, then sighed. He needed more towels if the dog insisted on bathing with him. No use now, he was already soaked. He sat and wagged his tail while Will finished up, keeping him grounded.

He awoke the next morning to a knock, and a soft bark, and he quickly hushed the oversized canine. Phantom was still damp from his bath, and the bed was slightly wet as well from sweat and wet dog. He opened the door, expecting Jack. He was not expecting the attractive Doctor Lecter to size him up in his underpants.

"Good morning Will. May I come in?"

"Wheres Crawford?" He needed a buffer for Jack, but he needed one more for Lecter.

"Deposed in court." *Fuck.* "The adventure will be yours and mine today." Phantom gave out a whine, as if he wanted to be included. "My apologies. Your canine companion as well." He smiled, tight lipped. He was wearing a mask, Will could see it. What did the Good Doctor have to hide? "May I come in?"

Will stepped aside, trying to figure if the mask was just for his benefit or a permanent fixture on the Doctor. It was impressive if it was just to keep his emotions hidden from Will. Not many people could. He pulled the blinds back a tad, Phantom whining dramatically and tunneling his nose under the pillows. Will smiled, and noticed Lecter wrinkling his nose in distaste as the sight of the dog on the bed.

He manerved around to take a seat at the small table in the room, taking tupperware out of his bag. “I am very careful about what I put into my body, which means I end up preparing most meals myself. A little protein scramble to start the day.” Will held back a snicker at the sight of the fancy tupperware. This man was refined. He wasn’t as unpleasant as most other psychiatrists, more like Dr. Bloom in his tolerability. “Some eggs, some sausage.” He also brought Will really good looking food, which earned him some points in Will’s book.

It tasted heavenly as well- much better than the Mcdonald's he was planning on grabbing for breakfast. “It's delicious, thank you.” Will again had to hold back laughter as he imagined the posh Doctors reaction to fast foods.

“My pleasure.” He received a polite smile in return. The Doctor liked politeness. He would have to earn it from Will. Such formalities did not come easy to him. Phantom hopped off the bed and came over to the table, sitting by Lecter’s feet facing away. He glanced back at him, and looked away if he was caught looking. Will smiled at this trick. Phantom was begging.

“Don’t mind him. He’ll have to eat before we leave but I spoiled him as a puppy.”

“Begging from the table a hard habit to break?”

“Very.” Will continued to eat, shooing Phantom away.

“I would apologize, for my analytical ambush, but I know I will be apologizing again and you will tire of that eventually. So I have to consider using apologies sparingly.”

“Just keep it professional.” Will liked Hannibal well enough, but he could see the same situation with Alana Bloom unfolding too easily.

“Or we could socialize like adults. God forbid we become too friendly.”

“I don’t find you that interesting.” *Not enough for that kind of heartache.*

“You will.” Will looked at him. Maybe not a repeat after all. “Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters.”

Will got up, walking to the mini fridge to retrieve his dogs food. “I don't think the shrike killed that girl in the field.”

“The devil is in the details. What didn’t your copycat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?” Phantom stood up and trotted over to Will, sitting and shaking his paw in Wills hand before he gave the dog his meal. A trick he employed to keep his dogs from being to rowdy at feeding time.

“Everything.” Will went back to his seat. “It's like he had to show me a negative, so I could see the positive. It-” He sighed, rubbing his face in his hands. “That crime scene was practically gift wrapped.”

“The mathematics of human behavior. All those ugly variables. Some bad math with this Strike fellow.” He started eating again. Will was glad that the man he was going to be working with had a strong stomach. “Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?”

Will poured them both some more coffee, trying to see if the Doctor had any ‘professional curiosity’ about him or if he were merely asking about the Shrike. Will felt like he was trying to read a brick wall. “He has quite a few.” It was a bit refreshing, to meet someone who was such a mystery. It meant they had something to hide.

“You ever have any problems Will?” Lecter asked. *Gotcha.*

He placed a hand to his chest and scoffed. “ *Me?* Oh no.” He casually made a vague gesture as he brought his hand down at the dog, obediently waiting by his uniform vest, his food long since wolfed down.

“Of course you don’t.” He looked up to be met with a smile. Wills brows furrowed. “You and I are just alike- problem free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about”

There was emotion Will could see now. For some reason Doctor Lecter thought he just made the best joke in the world. *Well hello Ego.* Now he caught the trail of one it would just get easier and easier to read others.

At least now he knew his sarcasm was appreciated by the Doctor.

“You know Will?” Will glazed back up at him from his plate as he resumed eating. “I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup. The finest china used for only special guests.”

Okay, maybe Hannibal was a little funny.

Will laughed, hard. Phantom wagged his tail, relaxing enough to take his eyes off the doctor for a moment. “How do you see me?” Will asked as he watched him preen with delight, his joke having hit the mark.

Doctor Lecter’s gaze suddenly turned dark. Will felt the monster lurking behind those eyes. “The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.”

Will supressed a shiver, unable to break the gaze.

“Finish your breakfast.” Doctor Lecter broke it, as he motioned down to Wills plate with his fork. Will picked his fork back up, barely managing to suppress his arousal.

That would be a bit too friendly.

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“What are you smiling at?” Will teased as they pulled up to the site. Phantom gentley snored in the backseat, a high whine in his throat when he yawned and stretched to see why they had stopped.

“Peeking behind the curtain. I’m just curious how the FBI goes about its business, when it's not kicking in doors.”

Will chuckled. “Yeah, Well you’re lucky we’re not doing house to house interviews. We found a piece of metal in Elise Nichols clothes. A shred from a pipe threader.”

“There must be hundreds of construction sites all over minnesota.”

“Certain kinda metal, certain kinda pipe, certain kinda pipe coating. So we’re checking at all the construction sites that use that kinda pipe.”

“What are we looking for?” Hannibal asked.

“Well at this stage anything really. But mostly anything peculiar.” Will got out of the car, hearing Hannibal follow behind him. He knew Hannibal was, or was going to be, a killer. And a gruesome one at that. Nobody else had those kinds of shadows in their mind, not that dark. He was curious however, what Hannibal would turn out to be. He’d hold his tongue for now.

He half-heartedly introduced them to the secretary and then began to plumage into the files, loading them into his car for future use. Garrett Jacob Hobbs stuck out to him, and he was slightly suspicious for what Hannibal did after he intentionally dumped papers onto the lady, but he was mostly irritated at the woman for not having any useful information. Still, he was the only person without an address, and that was suspicious. Missing work for days at a time was odd as well. They’d start there.

He inwardly chucked at Hannibal's attempts at probing, seeing how the FBI works. He knew he should say something to Jack, but the man was growing on him and he didn’t any sort of proof to his suspicions. He’d figure out his design and then decide if he still wanted Hannibal around.

The very reason Will left this line of work in the first place was his apathy towards killing. He didn’t feel horrified at the killers actions, it was rare for him to feel contempt or disgust. He decided that he wasn’t motivated enough to lose himself that way, no stranger to the toll it took on his mind.

He knew he should be horrified though, and *that's* what upset him the most.

“C’mon, let's see if we can get in for a chat.” Will told Hannibal, thankful for somebody else there to help with this. Phantom gave out a low whine, clearly distressed. He his his head under his paws and rolled off the seat and onto the floor of the car, shielding himself and

whining more. “It's okay bud, I’ll just be a moment.” He pat the back of the dogs head before popping an aspirin and leaving the car. He was halfway to the front door when it was pushed open, Mrs. Hobbs pushed outside, her throat slit several times over. He felt his hands start to shake as he tried to stunt the bleeding, unable to do anything more than panic. He drew his gun, and kicked down the door.

“Garrett Jacob Hobbs! FBI!” His hands were shaking, his arms soaked in the blood of the woman on the doorstep. His heart was pounding as he raced in. The girl was whimpering as she was held by her father, and he heard him whispering to her quietly. He didn’t hesitate the first time he pulled the trigger. Or the second. Or the tenth.

His hands trembled as he tried to stop the bleeding, the intense emotions coming from all around him. The hatred, the fear, the love, it was all to much, he couldn’t tell where any of it was coming from.

“See?”

Wills head whipped up, locking eyes with Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He felt the love, the fear, the… gratitude?

“See?”

Hannibal stepped in, replacing Wills trembling hands with his own. Will breathed a sigh of relief, Hannibal a blank wall that calmed his raging mind. No more emotions ping-ponging around in his head. Doctor Lecter held the girl steady as the paramedics came in, and rode with them to the hospital. Will trembled, he sat back down in his car, paramedics coming to look him over. Phantom leapt into the front seat, coming to blanket over his shoulders in a sort of hug. The dog made a huffing purr noise, and leaned into him harder. He took a breath. He went home.

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Will didn’t know what drove him to the hospital. Perhaps some lingering part of Garrett Jacob Hobbs in his mind. Perhaps the human instinct of bonding through shared trauma. The latter was more preferable, and as he saw Hannibal in the other chair in the room with Abigail, the one he was inclined to believe. For all three of them. He took a seat, and smiled. Phantom yawned at his feet. Looking at the doctors face, *Yes,* Will decided, *I do find you interesting.* He leaned back and rested his eyes, falling into sleep filled with feathered stags and great hounds.

Amuse Bouche

Chapter Summary

Will begins to look closer at Doctor Lecter, and Beverly Katz follows through.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will flinched each and every time the gun went off, his shots missing- broadly. He sighed and made the paper sheet come towards him so he could replace it and try again, and he looked up to see Garrett Jacob Hobbs in place of the paper. He loaded another clipp, and fired them off with shaking hands, unsure if what he saw was real-

He awoke to a tapping on his car window. Phantom grumbled, digging his head into Wills lap a bit further, sleepily trying to chase away the nightmares with a wet nose pressed against his belly.

“We’re here.” Jack stated simply, and he soothed the large dog, getting out of his seat and leaving the pooch to run amuck Crawford's car.

The cabin was secluded, and Will could feel the air of happy childhood memories, stained with death and blood. Will couldn’t help but remember his own father, teaching him to hunt and fish, always in a place with a good lake or river nearby. He did his best, despite Will’s… issues. He thinks he would have been bullied worse if they ever did settle in one place.

Will stepped into the cabin, breathing in the smell of cleaning supplies. Well cleaned of any evidence. He was careful. Will mused at his own dumb luck, half a hunch caught Hobbs. He took in the room, and went upstairs to take in the antler room. It was something out of a horror novel- or his own dreams. He saw the blood on a pair of the antlers, and turned to face Jack.

“Could be a permanent installation in your evil minds museum.” Will mused. He wasn’t sure why he was still here.

“Well, what we learn about Garrett Jacob Hobbs will help us catch the next one like him. There are still seven bodies unaccounted for.”

“Yea well, he was eating them.” He doubted they’d find even a bit of those girls. Hobbs wanted to honor every part of them.

“Had to be some parts he wasn't eating.”

“Not necessarily.”

“Okay so what if Hobbs wasn’t eating alone? It's a lot of work. Disappearing these girls, butchering them, and then- not leaving a shred of anything other than what's left in this room.”

“Someone he hunted with?” Will turned more to Jack.

“Someone who is in a coma. Who also happens to be someone he hunted with.” *You can’t be serious.*

“Abigail Hobbs is a suspect?” He flashed back to her, nearly dead in the hospital room. He, Alana, and Hannibal had all been making regular visits, so rarely she was alone in the day. He didn’t want to see her doing anything like that. He couldn’t. Not of her own will anyway.

“We’ve been conducting house-to-house interviews at the Hobbs residence, and at this property also.” Jack stated. “Hobbs spent alot of time here. Spent alot of time with his daughter here. She would make the ideal bait, wouldn’t she?”

“Hobbs killed alone.” He affirmed it more for himself. His eye caught something red in his flashlight- *a hair?* He pinched it between his fingers, looking at the coiled strand of ginger. “Someone else was here.”

Jack sighed and had him put the hair in an evidence bag, and let him take a breather.

He stepped out of the cabin, leaning on the outside wall of the cabin. He held his head in his hands and rubbed his temples, popping an aspirin out of the container in his pocket.

“Hey there.” Beverly Katz leaned against the wall next to him, and motioned over the Jack’s car. “How’d you get that thing for an ESA? My sister only got a lab-pitt mix. Tiny thing, I wanted to get her a Dobie to just to keep her safe.”

Will smiled, easily slipping into more of a comfortable state with the topic. “I got him special courses. He’s a Russian Bear Hound, at least mostly. Found him at a shelter when I was a cop, he was just a puppy they had found and my girlfriend at the time was working there. Went to pick her up and I picked him up too.” He frowned. “The relationship with her lasted only about 5 dates.”

Beverly let out a laugh. “But you got that cutie out of it.”

“Oh yeah I did. But the other two dogs I had at the time, Zoe and Buster? Oh they were so put off- he was twice their size already when I got him and he only grew. Still my biggest out of all of them.”

She gave him a look. “Total?”

“Eight dogs, nine cats.”

She whistled. “I’ll have to meet them sometime.”

Will turned and reached to her, trying to see if this was a romantic interest or- oh. Familial bond, probably reminded her a lot of that sister. He found he didn’t mind, he was feeling

pretty lonely anyway. “I have a spare bed.”

She let out a laugh, remembering their earlier conversation. “No splitting up sleeping quarters. On *one* bed with sleeping bags, braiding each other's hair. Teenage girl gossip. The whole nine yards. I was too much of a jock in high school to get that, but Maria says it's a blast. She's just going into college, about Abigail's age.”

“My hairs a bit too short to braid. Maria your sister?”

“Yeah, I’m really happy she has a supportive friend group. I never really had that. Jimmy and Brian kinda are now, but we could use a fourth.”

“Are we still in highschool?”

“Those two act like we are, why the hell not?” She slowly reached her arm over his shoulder, giving him time to back out if he wanted. He didn’t. Physical contact was nice after months of only canine/feline affection. He smiled at her, and she smiled back.

“Not just a ploy to get in my pants?”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re not a girl. Why would I want in your pants?”

“So what are we gonna gossip about? Should we invite Freddie Lounds?”

“Nah, she’s not my type. Maybe we can invite Brain and Jimmy though, after you get comfortable with me there. A good group of friends.”

“Thanks. That means alot that you want to include me.”

“Don’t mention it. We’ll have fun. As long as we separate the two of them, they may get frisky.”

Will laughed. Friends were nice.

___

Will cringed as his class greeted him with applause, trying his best not to turn around and leave. He went through his presentation, how he caught Hobbs, shear luck.

He could still see the scene in his mind, hear the voice haunting his thoughts. *See?* It asked. Will didn’t want to answer. Phantom sat by his feet, leaning into him and grounding him.

He shook his head of Hobbs, and moved on to the Copycat Killer. Such a familiar brutality, public shaming, experience. He’d felt this person before, knew their work. But the answer was lost on the tip of his tongue, so close but so far.

Phantom gave a rough bark of greeting as the students left the room, somebody he knew was near. Phantom liked Alana, she was good with him. Will looked up, slightly in dread. Alana

was a dear friend, but his romantic feelings made dealing with her a bit painful. She purposefully avoided being alone with him, and Will didn't have to guess why that was.

"Hi." He greeted. Keeping his head down. She scratched Phantom behind the ears, the hound leaning into the touch.

"How are you Will?" Delicate. She treated him like china. Keeping her voice low and calm.

"Uhm, I have no idea." It wasn't a lie. Hard to tell what he was feeling when he was around too many people.

"I didn't want you to be ambushed-" Phantom stood, his hackles rising, Will's brows furrowed at the dog.

"This is an ambush?" He pet the dog, trying to calm him.

"Ambush is later. Immediately later. Soon to now. When Jack arrives, consider yourself ambushed." Will made out Jacks figure behind Alana, the dog's reaction suddenly making more sense. Phantom had begun to associate stressed Will with Jack, and Phantom didn't like stressed Will.

"Here's Jack." He turned away, to hide himself behind his desk with a layer of bear hound between him and Crawford.

"How was class?" Jack asked.

"They applauded. It was inappropriate."

"Well, the review board would beg to differ. Your up for a commendation." Will inwardly grumbled. He didn't want that. "And they've uh, okayed active return to the field." Jack finished.

"The question is, do you want to go back to the field?"

Will froze. He could handle day to day with just Phantom, but he'd need something a bit more steady than his furry friends to handle that. He doubted Jack would approve of whiskey as that paddle.

"I want him, back in the field." *To do your job for you.* Will thought. He couldn't deny the appeal however, his classroom was beginning to get rather boring. He just hoped he didn't get too tempted into doing something bad. "And I've told the board I'm recommending a psych eval." *There's the catch.* If Alana evaluated him he would never have to worry about field work again, or ever ponder if he would have a chance with her- she'd run screaming for the hills.

He took a deep breath. Here goes everything. "Are we starting now?"

"Oh, the session wouldn't be with me." That sent even more alarm bells of in his head. At least Alana wouldn't try to institutionalize him. Every other psychiatrist would.

“Hannibal Lecter is a better fit. Your relationship isn't personal.” Except that one. Doctor Lecter was intriguing, he was obviously lonely behind the mask he wore, and a predator of mankind. He wouldn’t run screaming like Alana, but he wouldn’t put him under lock and key either. “But if you are more comfortable with Doctor Bloom-”

“I’m not gonna be comfortable with anybody inside my head.” But he’d prefer Doctor Lecter if he had to.

“You’ve never killed anybody before Will. It’s a deadly force encounter, and a lot to digest.” Alana was scared, concerned, she wanted to fix him. She didn’t want him in the field again.

“I used to work homicide.” He was used to death following him like a shadow, and went to exit the room. He didn’t need a psych eval.

“The reason you currently *used* to work homicide is because you didn’t have the stomach for pulling the trigger. You just pulled the trigger ten times.”

Fear, coming off in waves. “Wait, so the psych eval isn’t a formality?”

“No, it's so I can get some damn sleep at night.” Phantom growled.

“It’s okay boy.” he tried to sooth down the dog, to no avail.

“I asked you to get close to the Hobbs thing, I need to know you didn’t get too close. How many nights did you spend in Abigail Hobbs’ hospital room, Will?”

Will went silent, they were scared he lost himself in Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He didn’t. He knew who he was.

“Therapy doesn’t work on me.”

Jack took several steps closer to him, Phantom puffing up and taking a step forward.

“Therapy doesn’t work on you because you don’t let it.”

“Because I know all the tricks.”

“Maybe you need to unlearn some tricks.”

“Why not have a conversation with Hannibal?” Alana suggested. Will could see himself doing just that, see it leading to a much more dangerous repeat of his situation with Alana. “He was there, he knows what you went through.”

Will took off his glasses, and put them in his pocket. He was done talking, and he whistled once to have Phantom following him out.

“Come on Will, I need my beauty sleep!”

If things go south it's their funeral.

—

“Hello Will.”

“Doctor Lecter.”

“Please, come in.” Will stepped past him, out of the waiting room and into his office. He took it in, saw a man of refined taste, cultured, dignified. The space breathed with the Doctor.

“No hound today?”

“Phantom’s waiting in the car, thought you wouldn’t appreciate him in your space.”

“Not at all. I’ll walk you out to retrieve him. I would never deprive anyone of such a necessary support.”

Will was slightly surprised, but lead him out to his old car outside, taking Phantom out. As he was lead back in, he unclipped the dog. “No furniture.” He whispered, hoping the dog would behave himself. Phantom, as he normally did around Hannibal, watched the Doctor’s every move.

“Once he likes you he’ll start saying ‘hello’ when he sees you.”

“How fascinating. An odd breed for his use.”

“Well, I’m an odd man. We match.” Phantom walked around the space, choosing to settle by the couch and lie down. He still watched Hannibal.

“Please, feel free to move wherever you like.” Will took the offer, scaling the ladder in the office to the books. He wanted to see what novels the Doctor chose to keep around, knowing that none of these were just for show.

Hannibal collected some papers from the desk, stacking them and making sure they were in order. “What’s that?”

“Your psychological evaluation.” *Oh, he's a show off.* “You are totally functional and more or less sane. Well done.” *What?*

“Did you just *rubber stamp* me?” Will let himself smile, intrigued.

“Yes. Jack Crawford may lay his weary head to rest knowing he didn’t break you, and our conversation can continue unobstructed by paperwork.” Will tried to read him, looking for crack in the shell, seeing the mask extended into more of a suit. He barely got shit.

“Jack thinks I need therapy.”

“That’s what the dog is for.” Doctor Lecter liked his jokes. “What you need is a way out of dark places when Jack sends you there.”

“Last time he sent me into a dark place I brought something back.”

“A surrogate daughter?” There was something. Hope. Loneliness and hope. He dug his fingers into the crack, trying to pry more out. “You saved Abigail Hobbs’ life, you also orphaned her. That comes with certain emotional obligations, regardless of empathy disorders.”

“You were there, you saved her life too, do you feel obligated?”

“Yes.” There's that sense of loneliness again. Melancholy. Hope. “I feel a staggering amount of obligation.” Regret. Not for Abigail's life, for the loss of another. “I feel responsibility.” He practically oozed it. He saved her when he couldn’t save someone else. “I fantasize about scenarios where my actions may have allowed a different fate for Abigail Hobbs.” This was supposed to seem to Will as if the good Doctor was laying himself bare, to build trust, bring Will closer. Hannibal was bearing a part of him, but not anything nearly so vulnerable as he would have Will believe. But Hannibal wanted to foster trust in him, wanted Will to open as well. He wanted Will as his companion. Will weighed each move he made. He needed to see himself how Hannibal saw him, see if Hannibal was going to bend and mold him or take him as is. He preferred the later, and so was going to do his best to try to get Hannibal to prefer that too. Then choose to dump him to the FBI- or join his side. This would be fun.

“Jack thinks Abigail Hobbs helped her dad kill those girls.” He wouldn’t bear himself that easily.

“How does that make you feel.”

Will laughed. “How does it make you feel?”

“I find it vulgar.”

“Me too.”

“But entirely possible.”

“That's not what happened.” He told himself more than Hannibal.

“Jack will ask her when she wakes up, or have one of us ask her.” Us. Subtle, but there. He wants a unit.

“Is this therapy? Or a support group?”

“It’s whatever you need it to be. ” Will rolled his eyes. “And Will,” He glanced back to the Doctor, “The mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else.”

—

Will fired the gun, keeping himself steady, flinching with every shot. He hoped he wouldn’t turn to see another nightmare, sure this time he wasn’t dreaming. He was still a terrible shot though.

“I’m pretty sure firearm accuracy isn’t a prerequisite for teaching.” he startled, turning to face Beverly. “Plus you already have good enough guns.” She squeezed his arm. A friendly tease.

“I bet yours are better.” She laughed. “And I’ve been in the field before.”

“Now you’re back in the saddle. Ish.”

“Ish indeed. It took me ten shots to drop Hobbs.”

“Zeller wanted to give you the bullets he pulled out of Hobbs in an acrylic case, but I told him you wouldn’t think it was funny.”

“Probably not.” He was kinda peeved at the idea.

“I suggested one of those clackin’ swignin’ ball things.”

He almost snorted. “That would’ve been funny.” He put the divider back down, and prepared to take another shot.

“You’re a weaver.” She observed his stance. “I took you for an isosceles guy.”

“I have a rotator cuff issue, so I have to use the weaver stance.” He jumped when she put a hand on his shoulder.

“You are tight.”

“Yea, I got stabbed when I was a cop.”

“I got stabbed in the third grade. With a number two pencil. Thought I was gonna get lead poisoning.”

“They use graphite in pencils, not lead.” He corrected. She pressed behind him and adjusted his stance, moving his feet and such.

“See if that helps with the recoil.”

He hit the shots he fired this time. “That was better.”

“See, I know what I’m talking about.”

“You came all the way down here just to teach me how to shoot?”

“Nah. Good practice in case I need to teach a girlfriend in the future though. Jack sent me down here to find out what you know about gardening. Grab your dog, I’ll give you a ride.” She squeezed his shoulder, and started to help him clean up.

___

Will never wanted to see another mushroom as long as he lived. Everyone was having a hard time stomaching it.

“So, Lecter gave you the all clear?” Will sighed. “Therapy might work on you after all.” Will thought Jack may be a lot less inclined to have therapy work on him if he knew what Doctor Lecter did. Will may be even less inclined as well, once he figured out exactly what that was.

“Therapy is an acquired taste, which I have yet to acquire. But it served your purpose. I’m back in the field.”

“Local police found tire tracks on a hidden service road. Small animal traps were also discovered in the surrounding area.”

“He wanted to keep his crop undisturbed.”

“The only thing missing is the scarecrow.”

Will looked over the bodies, glad he didn’t really have a taste for fungi in the first place. “Okay, we got nine bodies, various stages of decay, and as you can see,” Price motioned over them, “all very well fertilized.”

“He buried them in a high nutrient compost.” Beverly stood, coming to talk to Jack and Will more head on. “He was enthusiastically encouraging decomposition.”

“They were buried alive with the intention of keeping them that way- for a little while.” Zeller continued to take photos.

“Long enough for the fungus to eat away any distinguishing characteristics.” Price huffed.

“Line and rebar were used to administer intravenous fluids after they were buried. He was feeding them something.” Zeller motioned to the lines suspended in the tree by him.

“No restraints?” Will asked. That was odd, how did he get them to stay in place?

“Just dirt.” Price answered.

“The other end of the air supply system comes up over there.” Beverly motioned. “It isn’t a very considerate clean air solution, clearly not a priority, because he isn’t lazy.”

“No. He’s not.” Will watched as the three collected what they needed and left him at the scene.

“Find any shiitakes?” Beverly teased Jimmy.

“No.”

She patted Will’s shoulder. “I’ll check on Phantom, we’ll be at my car if you need us for support.”

“Thank you.” He said, distracted by the scene. She smiled and walked off with the other two.

“Welcome back.” Jack said as he walked off. Will closed his eyes, and let the pendulum swing.

I do not bind his arms or legs as I bury him in a shallow grave. He is alive, but he will never be conscious again.

He won’t know that he's dying. I don’t need him to.

This is my design.

Will was snapped out of his internal monologue by Garrett Jacob Hobbs, in another man's grave. He was grabbed by him, pulling him down, seeing the man covered in mushrooms rather than the ghost of his victim. He called for help, throwing himself into a panic attack as he retreated back to Beverly's car, she squeezed his arm as she ran past, going to deal with the new development, and he buried his face in his dog's fur, the mutt gently whining and licking his face and his curls. He held onto the dog, holding on as tight as he could while he hyperventilated.

—

Will handed Doctor Lecter his clean bill of mental health with shaking hands. “This may have been a bit premature.”

“What did you see? Out in the field?”

“Hobbs.”

“An association?”

“A Hallucination. I saw him lying in someone else's grave.” Will was distressed, Phantom following him and leaning into him as he paced around Hannibal's office. Hannibal seemed a bit distressed at this too, but Will couldn’t read if it was genuine. If Doctor Lecter was going to psychoanalyze him he may as well return the favor.

“Did you tell Jack what you saw?” His tone implied he shouldn’t in the future, if it happens again.

“No.” Will continued to pace.

“It’s stress. Not worth reporting. You displaced the victim of another killer’s crime with what could arguably be considered your victim.” Hannibal rationalyzed the event, Will was curious how far he’d rationalyze things for him. It was soothing to hear. Nice.

“I don’t consider Hobbs my victim.” Will stated simply.

“What do you consider him?”

“Dead.” He leaned against one of the columns in Hannibal's office, taking a deep breath as he pet Phantom behind the ears. It was startling how safe he already felt here, despite this only being his second session. Will knew Hannibal was doing his best to get Will to relax and open up to him, but despite knowing the tricks, they were working.

“Is it harder, imagining the thrill somebody else feels killing, now that you’ve done it yourself?”

Will thought, long and hard. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to let it work on him. So, he nodded. Slowly, and gaining confidence in his answer. He did a half smile at Hannibal, before glancing back down to his dog.

Hannibal seemed to come to a decision too, walking over to him in sure, powerful strides. “The arms. Why did he leave them exposed? To hold their hands? To feel the life drain from their bodies?”

“No, that’s too esoteric for someone who took the time to bury his victims in a straight line. He’s more… practical.” Will pushed off the podium, leaving Phantom and leaning on Hannibal's desk instead.

“He was cultivating them.”

“He was keeping them alive. He was feeding them intravenously.”

“But your farmer let his crops die, save for the one that didn’t”

“And the one that didn’t died on the way to the hospital- no they aren’t the crops, they’re the fertilizer. Their bodies were covered in fungus.”

“The structure of a fungus mirrors that of a human brain- an intricate web of connections.”

“So maybe he admires their ability to connect in a way human minds can’t.”

“Yours can.” Will laughed, looking up at Hannibal. He made eye contact deliberately as the laughter caught. He saw the wolf in sheep's clothing attempting to form a pack with the sheepdog. Will contemplated taking him up on that, but it was still too soon to decide.

“Yea, not physically.”

“Is that what your farmer is looking for? Some sort of connection?”

“He’s lonely. He wants someone to see him, wants a companion.” He wasn’t quite just talking about the mushroom man anymore, as he held Doctor Lecters gaze for a moment more, before looking away. “He can’t make friends so he grows them instead.”

—

Will stood at the table, this time without Bev to support him. He felt a little intimidated by Zeller and Price, Zeller having an abrasive personality that tended to clash with his. And everyone else's.

“What were they soaked in?”

“A highly concentrated mixture of hardwoods, shredded newspaper, and pig poop- Perfect for growing mushrooms and other fungi.”

“It was not the mushrooms, though, they all died of kidney failure.”

“Dextrose in all the catheters. He probably used some kind of dialysis or peristaltic to pump fluids after their circulatory systems broke down.” Beverly came back then, handing the paper to Zeller. Will sighed in relief.

“Force feeding them sugar water?”

“You know who loves sugar water?” Will had feeling he was going to learn more obscure flora and fauna facts from Jimmy. “Mushrooms! They crave it.”

“Recovering alcoholics, they crave sugar!” Zeller pitched in. “Uh, don’t take that personally, buddy.”

“Oh I’m not recovering.” Were these two *flirting?* Beverly was right. They would have to separate them.

“Feed sugar to the fungus in your body, the fungus creates alcohol, so it's like friends helping friends really.”

“It's not just alcoholics who have compromised endocrine systems. They all died of kidney failure?” The three nodded. “Death by diabetic ketoacidosis.”

“Did you know they were diabetics?” Bev asked Zeller.

“Uh, we don’t know, if they are, in fact, diabetics.” Zeller said, trying not to sound stupid.

“No, they're all diabetics. He induces a coma and puts them in the ground.” Will wished Zeller wouldn’t argue with him on everything. It was tiring and frustrating.

“How is he inducing diabetic comas?”

“Changes their medication. So he's a doctor or a pharmacist, or he works somewhere in medial services.”

“He buries them, keeps them alive long enough for the circulatory systems to soak it up-”

“-So he can feed the mushrooms!”

“We dug up his mushroom garden.”

“He’s gonna want to grow a new one.” Maybe Zeller wasn’t so bad. The four of them worked nicely together.

___

Will followed Jack through the parking lot of the pharmacy. It was surprisingly easy to track him down once they realized what profession he was in and identified the bodies through dental records. Eldon Stammets, got away. His car didn't, the tenth victim still inside the trunk. Will grinned as he smashed through the car window- he had always wanted to do that. After paramedics took her away, they went back to his work station, checking through the browser history.

“Freddie Lounds.” Zeller said.

“Tattlecrime.com. Fucking hell.” Jack cursed, kicking a cabinet in his rage.

Beverly began to read from the article, all horrible things, but stopped herself, voice breaking as she repeated words. She stopped.

“Keep going.”

“It's about Will.” He could hear the ‘I don’t want him to hear this.’ in her tone. The horror, the hurt, the protectiveness. She was looking out for him.

“Go on.” Jack wasn’t.

“‘One demented mind to catch-’ She goes into a lot of detail.” She stopped again, hoping Jack wouldn’t pressure her for more.

“Son of a bitch.”

Will slipped into his mindset, tracked him, where would he go?

___

Will dreamt, in a Abigail Hobbs’ hospital room. He dreamt of a great stag with a mane of bloodstained feathers, and an impressive crown of antlers stretching like thickets of thorns. It

patrolled outside her door, waiting, watching, guarding. The hallway darkened, he could hear whispers-

Alana Bloom was reading to Abigail.

“What are you reading?”

“Flannery O’Conor.” She smiled. “When I was Abigail's age I was obsessed- I even tried to raise peacocks because she raised peacocks. But, they were really stupid birds.” She kept her voice low, as to not startle him or wake the sleeping girl.

“You could be reading to a killer.” Will wasn’t sure which one of them he meant when he said this.

“Innocent until guilty and all that.” He felt like he would have laughed if she were somebody else. “I’m about to breach the subject of that ‘Takes One to Know One” article.”

“Oh that.” he shifted a bit on the couch, glancing down to find Phantom asleep on the floor. “Did Jack send you?”

“No, I sent me.” Alana stared at him, clearly waiting for him to talk.

Will looked at her. “I don’t think we’ve ever been alone in a room together, have we?” At least his situation with Hannibal wasn’t repeating that. In a way it was nice, but on the other hand Will knew things could get very unprofessional very quickly.

“I haven’t noticed, have we?” Alana lied through her teeth. Will could see it too. It hurt. “Not that we’re necessarily alone now.” She glanced back at Abigail. Will looked through her eyes, at Abigail and him. He could see that she wanted to save both of them, that she considered them fragile and needing saving. It was patronizing.

“Yea, right. Back to ‘Jack Crawford’s Crime Gimp’” Will sat up and stretched, Phantom stirring and doing the same.

“It certainly creates an image. I don’t need to talk about it if you don’t.” Handle with care.

“No, no, we can talk about or not talk about whatever you want.” Will gave an approximation of a smile, surprised to note that he was feeling less butterflies towards Alana and more resentment. “Actually I was… I was just enjoying listening to you read.” He managed a better smile this time, and Alana seemed convinced.

“Abigail Hobbs is a success for you.”

He glanced to her, laying on her hospital bed, asleep, oblivious, hurt. He remembered trying to help in, back in Hobbs’ kitchen, Hannibal’s steady hands saving her for him. “She wouldn’t be a success if I was alone. She doesn’t look like a success even now.”

“Don’t feel sorry for yourself because you saved this girl's life-”

“I don’t. I don’t feel sorry for myself at all.” He struggled to find his next words, stuttering and restarting. “I-I, I feel, uhm,” He paused for a long moment, Phantom butting his head into his thighs before settling. “Good.” He scratched behind the hounds ears, and it yawned it big as it settled its head in his lap.

—

Will answered his phone, still feeling a bit peeved about his talk with Alana. She didn’t used to unsettle him like that- things were changing.

“Will it's Jack, you at the Hospital?”

Will adjusted his grip oh Phantoms leash. “Yes I am.” What was it now?

“Stammets knows about Abigail.”

Will dropped Phantoms leash and pulled out his gun, he gave a sharp whistle and took off down the hall, Phantom quick on his heels. He made it to Abigail's room, finding her missing.

He went to the nurse. “Where is she?” Phantom barked. “Where is she? Abigail Hobbs, the girl in 408, where is she?”

“They took her for tests.”

“Who took her?”

“I-I don’t know-”

“Who took her?!” The lady was startled, looking wildly between the probably deranged man with a gun, and his dog. Will took off down the hall again, Phantom quick to follow. He ran down the steps two at a time, and managed to find Stammets wheeling Abigail into the parking lot.

“Hey!” As soon as Stammets turned to him, he shot Stammets in the shoulder, Phantom running ahead and pounceing on him. “Hold!” He gave the order, and Phantom held Stammets down, snarling in his face the whole while. Will knocked his gun away and checked Abigail’s pulse, relieved to find her breathing.

“What were you gonna do to her?” He asked, already knowing the answer. His blood ran like ice in his veins, and he was just looking for a reason to put a bullet in his head too.

“We all evolved from mycelium. I’m simply, reintroducing her to the concept.” He leaned back from the maws of the snarling hound.

“By burying her alive?”

“The journalist said you understood me...” Stammets flinched away, trying to keep his voice down so the dog wouldn’t snap.

“I can understand just fine. Doesn’t mean I agree with or support your actions, or even like them. Hold, Phantom.” He reiterated the order, keeping the dog back.

“But you can see. When you walk through a field of mycelium they *know* you are there, they know you are *there* . The spores reach for you as you walk by. I know who you’re reaching for, I know. Abigail Hobbs. You should have let me plant her. You would have found her in a field, where she was finally able to reach back!”

Phantom snarled and dug his claws in. “Tsk tsk. Keep calm Mr. Stammets. We wouldn’t want Phanny getting too excited.” Will teased, stepping closer. He wanted to give the order, a simple word, destroy the man he had under his claws. He imagined it, the sight of him gasping for air as Phantom-

It was then that the police team flooded in, and he called his dog back so they could apprehend him. He tossed him a treat, picking up his leash walking with Abigail as the nurses took her back to her room.

—

“When you shot Eldon Stammets, who was it you saw?” Will stared at some point in space in Hannibal's office, facing away from where Hannibal stood.

“I didn’t see Hobbs.” Phantom was following Hannibal around again today, staring at him constantly. The hound was slightly off putting, it could see into souls nearly as easy as it's master- could even see the predator behind his person suit.

“Then it’s not Hobbs’ ghost that is haunting you is it? It's the inevitability of there being a man so bad that killing him felt good.” Doctor Lecter was trying to gently introduce Will to the idea of killing being a euphoric experience, bring him to terms with the darkness in him. Hannibal saw it, with nearly every move Will made.

“Killing Hobbs felt just.” Will rebutted. Hannibal knew that with time and patience, Will could be a perfect companion. Once Abigail awoke he could use her as well, bringing a happy family together. He felt hope for the first time in a very long time, treading lightly and carefully around Will’s hard set morals would be the most difficult part.

“Which is why you’re here. To prove that sprig of zest you feel is from saving Abigail and not from killing her dad.”

“I didn’t feel a sprig of zest when I shot Eldon Stammets.”

“You didn’t kill Stammets.”

Will seemed to choose his next words carefully. “I thought about it. I’m still not entirely sure that wasn’t my intention, pulling the trigger, letting Phantom hold him down.”

Hannibal felt the beginnings of a smile tug his lips. There was a small bit of rope, Will was starting to open up a bit. “Your hound follows your every order.”

“He can be temperamental if he thinks I’m in danger. If Eldon had been a bit more unhinged he wouldn’t have survived.”

“If your intention was to kill him it's because you understand why he did the things he did.”

“All too well.”

“It's beautiful in it's own way.” Will turned to face him. “Giving voice to the unmentionable.” Hannibal continued.

Will gave a chuckle. “I should’ve stuck to boat motors in Louisiana.”

“A boat engine is a machine, a predictable problem, easy to solve. You fail, there’s a paddle, Where was your paddle with Hobbs?” Hannibal tried to gently lead Will-

“You’re supposed to be my paddle.” And it worked. Will sat in the usual chair patients took, rubbing his temples while his dog laid at his feet.

“I am.” He reassured, taking a seat opposite Will. “it wasn’t the act of killing Hobbs that got you down was it? Did you really feel so bad because killing him felt so good?”

“I liked killing Hobbs.” Will whispered, a secret. Not one he seemed to horrified of however.

“Killing must feel good to god too. He does it all the time. And are we not created in his image?”

Will rolled his eyes, shakily. “That depends on who you ask.”

“Gods terrific. He dropped a church roof on 34 of his worshipers last Wednesday night in Texas, while they sang a hymn.”

Will furrowed his brows looking up and meeting Hannibal's eyes head on. In those moments, Hannibal felt as if he was being seen all to clearly, the monster he tried so hard to keep hidden bared to the curly haired profilers gaze. “And did god feel good about that?” He asked, cocking his head to the side.

“He felt powerful.”

When Will left that evening he smelt a tiny whiff of a sweet scent, something in Will was changing.

___

It was close to 12:00 when Will heard the car pull up to his house. He set down his glass, still half full of his third serving of whiskey. He opened the door when it was knocked on, to Beverly Katz, in fuzzy pajamas, holding a sleeping bag and a bag full of various alcoholic beverages, snacks, and- rock band?

“Hey sleepover buddy. Ready for this?” She shoved past him, greeting his zoo with happy smiles and pets. “I couldn’t be sure you'd have any gaming consoles, so I brought my Wii and some games. And some alcohol, weed, some skittles, pringles- the usual stuff.” She said as she unloaded her bag onto his bed. “Do you like Pokemon? Also, I hope you have a sleeping bag too, or otherwise I don't think it will work as well.”

“I’m- I don’t, what-” he smiled, pleasantly surprised she actually showed up. It was sudden, and he half wished she had called ahead, but he was touched that she wanted to spend time with him outside of work.

“I said I would, I’m following through. Me, and you, no bodies, no Jack, no killers, but your entourage of furry friends can join us.” Phantom ran downstairs, giving a rough bark of greeting. She rubbed behind his ears, opening the can of pringles and giving him a chip. “Where is your TV? And do you have a bong? I brought my pipe just in case you don’t.”

“Uhm, the TV is upstairs-”

“Great! C’mon. Where’s the ‘nip for your cats? We can’t get high without them.”

“I’ll get it. A-and no, I don’t have a bong,” They were *FBI,* for god's sake. She raised an eyebrow at him. He sighed deeply. “But I have a volcano and a pen.” She smiled.

He took out the jar of catnip from the cabinet, the felines beginning their loud pleadings, and followed her upstairs, leading her to the upstairs bedroom. It wasn’t dusty, though he hadn’t been in here for several months, because it's where all the cats liked to sleep. There was even a queen sized mattress in here, he had bought it for his father, when he came to visit. It had been a long time, the man passed away around a year ago. Hunting trip gone wrong, he found himself on the wrong side of a buck’s antlers.

“Sweet dude.” Will snapped out of his memories as she started to set up the console and controllers, as well as the drum set for the game. “Next month we can have a full band, if you’re still cool with Jimmy and Brian that is. Any preference for instrument?”

“I’ve never played-”

“Vocals are good for beginners. This is gonna be *sweet-”* Will watched as she went on, pulling a set of fluffy pj’s from her bag. She started talking about how she was going to do this *every* friday, how happy she was to start this, and other things as she hearded him into the bathroom where she let him change into the spares she had brought over- “You’ve *got* to wear the outfit for this”- and he wondered if he had a spare toothbrush or if she brought that too. The material was softer on his skin than he was used too, the dog paw print making him chuckle.

He went and got his sleeping bag, stepping back into the room with her and sitting on the bed. She started talking again, gossip around the lab and such, celebrity news, as she started the game up, taking out the guitar and calibrating everything. They were up nearly all night, playing and drinking and smoking. After an hour on the wii they stopped and started messing around with the other things in her bag. It was some of the most fun he'd had in years.

And if he woke up the next morning with painted nails and a horrible hangover, head resting on Bev's chest as she snored in her sleeping bag, and smiled a little bit brighter despite the headache? Well, that was his business then. He finally had a friend.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bitch to write, and I'm not 100% happy with the last scene? But I can always revise it later. Let me know what you guys think!

Potage

Chapter Summary

Abigail wakes up, and Hannibal starts to grow closer to Will.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will huffed as he let his dogs out, the cool spring breeze tickling his calves. He had a hope in his chest- today was friday, he got to see Doctor Lecter and Beverly Katz and let his mind rest from the horrors of his daily life. He watched the dogs run and pee, Ellie trotting far behind as the old gal was much slower than the rest of his pack. He stepped off his porch, admiring the scenery, when his gaze fell on Alana Bloom. He felt heat rise to his face as it occurred to him that he was in his boxes and a shirt, and unlike Beverly, Alana had an interest in men.

“Morning.”

“Didn’t hear you drive up.”

“Hybrid. Great car for stalking.” She took a few more steps towards him.

“Uhm. I’m compelled to go cover myself.” He took a few steps back.

“I have brothers.”

“Well I’ll put a robe on just the same.” Will insisted. He hated being bare in front of other people. “Do you want coffee? And more immediately why are you here?”

“Yes, and Abigail Hobbs woke up.” Will stopped, turning to face Alana.

“Well, you know how to bury the lede.” He remarked sarcastically. In his head he was already planning the call to Hannibal, to share the good knews if he hadn’t already heard it. He stuttered in his thoughts for barely a moment, wondering when the psychiatrist had so easily become his first thought.

“Do you want me to get you a cup of coffee?”

“No, I want to get my coat” he whistled twice, his pack coming back to him, Phantom at the front. The dog still only had his collar on, the vest in its place in Will’s closet, on the shelf above his shirts.

“Let’s have a cup of coffee.” She insisted, walking up to stand next to him and brushing her hand with his arm. She had been much more affectionate and close since he’d started seeing Hannibal, it was odd. He didn’t like it as much as he would have a few months ago.

As they sat down with their mugs, Alana petting Cecilia when she brushed against her legs, the white cat running off to sit with Scarlet in the sun and groom each other (as always), the phone began to ring. Jack Crawford. Will starred mostly ahead as he determinedly sipped his coffee and Ellie began to howl, as she did when the phone rang.

Alana glanced over to the phone as he took another swallow. He wasn’t going to pick up. Nearly the exact moment the phone stopped ringing, Will’s cell went off. Ellie quieted her barking a bit,rrtfderrr the vibration not bothering her like the ringing, but Wolf went crazy at the noise on the table. The bushy maine coon hopped up and batted Wills phone off the table, Maroomba pouncing on it as it hit the floor and trying to chew on it. Zoe and Buster started up their barking as they did when Maroomba got something, and Harley came over to watch as always. Will starred on, not so much as flinching at the scene around him. As he took another sip Alana looked away uncomfortably.

When the phone settled and then restarted, Maroomba jumped and scampered off under Harley’s legs and up the stairs, making the big dog jump up and knock himself into Winston, who fell over. Cookie began to bark, and Will sighed. “Is he gonna keep calling?” Alana twitched, looking uncomfortable and slightly amused at the pets antics, Whiskey still fast asleep on Max’s back, the dog-cat pair inseparable as always.

“Jack wants you to go see her.”

“And you don’t?” Will tensed, he felt the concern coming off her in waves, the relief, and the tension. This was a battle she was going to fight as much as she could.

“Eventually. Jack thinks Abigail was an accomplice to her father's crimes. I don’t wanna get in the middle of you and Jack, but if I can be helpful to you as a buffer-”

“A buffer is good. Hannibal’s been helping me with that too. You both rattle Jack. You considerably more so.” She was nervous. Her mood brightened at the mention of Hannibal, her college one she held in very high regard. News that he was doing his job as Will’s psychiatrist ~~*the way she wanted him too*~~ right made her happy.

“Hannibal's too polite to say what he really thinks directly to Jack, it would be rude.”

“You aren’t.”

“I say what I think Jack needs to hear. That’s not always what he wants to hear.”

“He respects you both far too much to yell at you no matter how much he wants too.” *Like he does at me* was left unsaid, Alana already was after Jack, and he knew if she got anything else to throw at him a few choice words to Hannibal would have him pulled back out of the field.

“And I take advantage of that.”

Will thought about Abigail, what he had saved her from, her waking up, alone, not seeing anyone who really knew what she went through. Only he and Hannibal did. He made up his mind.

“Abigail Hobbs doesn’t have anyone.”

Alana looked at him. He felt the sourness of pity, a lime yellow cloud in her emotional musk. “You can’t be her everyone.” *Still a broken thing.* “When I said what i was going to say in my head it sounded really insulting so I’m going to find another way to say it-”

“Say it the insulting way.” Will insisted. Take the gloves off.

“Dogs keep a promise a person can’t.”

“I’m not collecting another stray.”

“The first person Abigail talks too about what happened can’t be anyone who was there when it happened. So that means no Doctor Lecter either.” Alana told him. Nicely but firmly. Like talking to a child.

“Yea much less the guy who killed dad.” Will kept his eyes low, feeling another splash of pity and more concern. “Jack’s wrong about Abigail” he said firmly.

“Let me reach out to her my own way.” Will nodded. Alana was smart enough about this thing- she had a degree in it. The phone began to ring again- Doctor Lecter this time. Alana said goodbye quickly, leaving a full mug of coffee empty space.

“Hello?” He answered.

“Good morning Will. Have you heard the good news?” The thick accented voice came through the phone.

“‘Morning, Doctor Lecter, Abigails awake.” He said by way of answer. Looking at where Ellie had gone to sit. He needed to train her out of her howling habit when the phone rang.

“Indeed she is. Would you like me to come collect you so we may take the trip to see her together?”

“Like we took the trip to see her dad?”

“This time as more than strangers, however. And hopefully with a far more pleasant outcome.” Phantom took water from the bowl like he was eating kibble, and Will took out the food for their morning meal.

“Sure, Alana wants to talk to her first however. ‘Said the first person she talks to can’t be someone who was there.

“You talked to Alana? I assumed Jack told you.”

“She stopped by this morning when I let the dogs out, stepped out before you called.”

` “I see. How did you sleep Will, Do I need to bring breakfast?”

Will let out a laugh as he leaned against the counter.

“By the time you get me tonight it would be dinner. And I slept alright, usual night.”

“My dear Will, are you asking me to dinner?” Will startled, spooking the dogs as he stuttered loudly. Did he?

“Uhm,-”

“Why then I accept. I’ll bring something nice, shall we have a stew?”

“A stew would be lovely, but-”

“At your usual appointment time? I’m thinking a Lamb Navarin.”

“I’m not-”

“I’ll see you at 7:30, my dear Will.” There was a click as the Doctor hung up on him. Will blinked. He had expected a manipulation into getting him to say something that could be misconstrued- but this? Will dialed Beverly, letting her know what his plans were.

“So you’re getting laid?”

Will pinched the bridge of his nose. “He's just having dinner and we’re seeing Abigail, and besides, *psychiatrist* . I’m letting you know I’m not going to be home until late.”

“Okay, I’ll come tomorrow. We both have the day off and I can show up early in pjs with pancakes.”

He smiled. “That sounds great.”

“Call me if you get dicked though, so I won’t worry if the house is empty. I’m still going to your place to play with my friends and eat pancakes though.”

“ *I’m not getting dicked.* Jesus, Bev. And I know you like my pack better than me.” He joked. He scratched behind Phantoms ears, the dog sitting and waiting for his vest.

“Yeah dude, I only show up for the dogs. See you tomorrow.”

He smiled. “Tomorrow. Bye.”

“Bye.”

He wondered if Abigail had a friend like Beverly, maybe from school, or if she was alone.

—

Will zoned out slightly, as he taught his class about the shrike case, slides of the girls, and him and Abigail. He talked about the copycat- the familiarity in their killer was still eating at him. The copycat he knew led a double life, but he didn't dare start on that to the class. Yet.

He felt, more than saw Jack and Hannibal enter, He felt determination, stubbornness, and the usual Jack-is-on-a-case-and-will-not-stop stuff. He also got a strange feeling of pride, happiness, hope, and disgust. Will recognized Doctor Lecter's normal feeling of hope when he was near him, but was put off by the pride. That disgust was a clue however- maybe his kills would all be clean. It was off, being around someone so optimistic and hopeful, but it was probably healthy for him. The probably-is-or-will-be-a-murderer vibe wasn't so healthy.

Will stuttered a bit when he talked the profile. Inserting his personal take on the masterpiece, calling it the art that it was, had earned him a quickly snuffed spark of arousal from Doctor Lecter, who clearly hadn't expected that quickly enough to wall it out. It drove his train of thought off, but looking back at the slides refocused him. He proposed his theory, feeling a spark of fear with a well of pride come from Hannibal. Excitement that was not his own coursed through his veins, but just for a moment. When he turned to the two after he dismissed his class, Hannibal was a blank wall again.

It was sunset when they came to the hospital, Will and Hannibal sharing a frankly mind blowing stew, and chatting about everything and nothing. Will was still reeling from Hannibal pulling out his chair, and taking his arm as he walked him to his *bentley*- He had asked if this was okay for the therapist-patient relationship they had, but Hannibal said that they were more than that, they were friends, and so Will passed it off as him being european and tried to dismiss it.

Tried . Hannibal gave him the same treatment when they arrived, and Will was horribly red but didn't want to come off as rude to the doctor, as so had been struck with horrible stares Doctor Lecter seemed obliviously happy to. Will was more of a good nervous he realized, as Hannibal's aura of happy and affectionate seeped so easily into him too, relaxing him exponentially. And so they walked through the hospital together, arms linked.

As he neared to Abigail's door, he heard Freddie Lounds speaking. "-He catches insane men because he can think like them. Because he is insane." She turned to look at them, Phantom giving a low growl. Will started to pull away from Hannibal, but he put one of his hands over Will's. *Damn europeans and their manners.*

"Would you excuse us please." A low voice and slight smile, the dog giving a bark before settling down. Looking through her eyes, she saw him as a demon, a great hound at his heels. One who, given the chance, would not hesitate to kill her. Fear, nervousness, disgust, her mask leaked these through, despite her best ability. "I'm Special Agent Will Graham-" he started, about to motion to Hannibal.

“By Special Agent he means not really an agent. He didn’t get past the screening process.” She looked him dead in the eye, posturing to make herself less of a target. He could feel a crack, not from Freddie, a want to kill, when she uttered her next words. “Too unstable.” That wasn’t his. Wasn’t Abigails. He turned to glance at Doctor Lecter.

“I really must insist you leave the room.” Hannibal stated calmly. Phantom growled his agreement.

“If you wanna talk-” Freddie reached out a business card, it bring then take gently by Will and ripped it half, keeping one hand on the Doctors arm and putting it in his pocket.

She gave one last glance to Abigail, the left the clearly panicked girl in the room with her soon-to-be fathers. “Abigail.” He took off his glasses, lowering his shields. “This is Doctor Lecter. Do you remember us?” He asked, his eyes kept low.

“I remember you. You killed my dad.” Will flinched as if he’d been struck. He could feel the resentment and fear, palpable to him as she stared him down.

“You’ve been in bed for days Abigail. Why don’t we have a walk?”

___

The greenhouse was bathed in an odd light, the moon shining through the glass. Will now assisted Abigail in walking, ashamed that he missed Hannibal's touch so much.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t save your mother.” She pet Phantom where he walked next to them. “We did everything we could, but she was already gone.”

Resentment. “I know. I saw him kill her.” Will helped her sit.”He was loving right up until the second he wasn’t. He kept telling me he was sorry, to just hold still, he was gonna make it all go away.” Will knew the wall of trauma very well, that wall where the emotions screamed behind, like a damn. Don’t build houses under that damn, the floods will come and wash them all away.

“There was plenty wrong with your father Abigail, but there’s nothing wrong with you.” He could feel genuine paternal affection towards her, not just an echo of Hobbs. “You say he was loving, I believe it. That's what you brought out in him.”

“It's not all I brought out in him.” Fear. Regret. He wanted to reach out, hold her, stroke her hair. “I’m gonna be messed up, aren’t I?” Sorrow. “I’m worried about nightmares.”

“We’ll help you with the nightmares.” Worry, waves of it, from Hannibal. Suspicion as well, though he couldn’t believe it. Hannibal had been there- he knew she was innocent.

“There’s no such thing as getting used to what you experienced.” He told her, sitting down. “It bothers me a lot. I worry about nightmares too.” He was trying to be open, to get her to do the same. He ignored that he was essentially opening up to his psychiatrist-friend-??? At the same time. Phantom laid his head in Abigail’s lap, smiling and rolling his tongue out. He

could feel Hannibal's disgust as he drooled on her legs, tail wagging, and he and Abby shared a laugh. She stroked the dogs head.

“So killing somebody, it feels that bad? Even if you have to do it, it feels that bad?”

Will chose his next words carefully. “It feels powerful. What he was, empathizing with what he was, was scarier than the horror of taking a life.”

“I wanna go home.” Abigail insisted.

“Tomorrow, we’ll take you.” Will said, making the note to let Bev know.

As soon as they stepped out, he took a moment to call her, she ripped him a bit but settled for just showing up Sunday night and catching a ride to work together monday. “You’re close with Miss Katz?”

“Yeah, she's been a really good friend.” He said, putting his phone away.

“Enough that she sleeps over often?”

“Well yeah-” Will looked up at Hannibal, realizing what he meant. “Not like that, she doesn’t like men and I need a little more persuasion before I’ll date anyone so-”

“I never said you were dating.”

“I don’t have the capacity for one night stands. I get too attached.”

“Noted.” Will opened his mouth, about to question the pleased smile that spread on the Doctor’s face despite the insistence that they were friends, but was interrupted by a shout.

“Special Agent Graham!” He turned, seeing Freddie Lounds coming up to him where he clung to Hannibal's arm like a maiden. It was embarrassing, and could very likely come back to bite him if Freddie saw too much of it, but he didn’t want to seem rude by denying him. Will couldn't argue against the fact that he really liked the delicate treatment from Hannibal. It came more from the want to spoil him than from the not wanting to break him, and was grateful that the Doctor was such a good friend. “I don’t think we’ve ever been formally introduced. I’m Freddie Lounds.”

“Are you trying to salvage this joke from the mouth of madness?” Phantom barked, staying by Will’s knees. Will slipped his glasses on, needing the added barrier.

“Please. Let me apologize for my behavior in there. It was sloppy and hurtful and misguided.”

“Miss Lounds. Now is not the time.”

She glanced at him, not taking true fear from the predator whose arm Will was clutching too like some Countess at a ball, and then continued coming at Will. “Look, you and I may have our own reasons for being here, but I think we both genuinely care about what happens to Abigail Hobbs.”

“You told her I was insane.”

“I can undo that.”

Will felt like laughing. “You help Abigail see me as more than her father’s killer, and I help you with online add sales?”

“I can undo what I said.” Her smile dropped. “I can also make it alot worse.”

Phantom growled and leaned forward into his collar, against the leash. He clutched it a tiny bit tighter. “Miss Lounds.” he purred, leaning in, the dog taking another step. “It isn’t very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.” Phantom snarled. Freddie took a step back, and Will felt Hannibal begin to preen with pride. The man was odd.

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“‘It isn’t very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.’ You know what else isn’t very smart?” Jack lamented, looking at the two men in his office. The energy was strange in the room. Hannibal was absolutely over-the-moon, this is the most Will ever felt from him happiness wise, and Jack was seething with anger. Alana was disappointed, worried, *She thinks I may be cracking.*

“You were there. And you let those words come out of his mouth.”

“I trust Will to speak for himself.” Wasn’t he smug. It was kind of cute when Will thought about it. And then didn’t because Alana was right behind him and he had done this before.

“Evidently you shouldn’t.” Phantom whined, leaning into Hannibal’s leg, asking for treats or pats.

“I’m just happy the story wasn’t about Abigail Hobbs.” Alana pointed out as Will started to drift, watching Hannibal attempt to pat the dog without getting hair on himself, gently tapping his palm on the dogs head.

“Well, then it’s a..” Will blocked out the rest of the room, and it was him, Hannibal, and Phantom. Hannibal lifted his hand, and made a slight face at the hair hat had stuck to his palm regardless of the fact that he didn’t rub. Will realized it was probably one of the funniest micro-expressions Will had ever seen.

“You said she was practical.” Will snapped back into the conversation, hoping the topic was still Abigail.

“That could just mean she has a dissociative disorder.” Will thought it was good to mention that. He wasn’t sure what Jack was planning, but it couldn’t be good for her.

“You take her home, she may experience intense emotions, respond aggressively, or re-enact some aspect of the traumatic event without even realizing it.”

Not liking Alana's answers, Jack turned to Doctor Lecter. "Where do you weigh in on this Doctor?"

Hannibal was wiping his hand on his handkerchief, because *of course* he has a handkerchief. "Doctor Bloom is right." Jack looked sour. "However, there is a scenario where revisiting the trauma site could help Abigail heal and actually prevent denial."

"We have a difference of opinion, therefore I am going to choose the opinion that best serves my agenda.I need to know if you're right about the copycat Will." Jack smiled, and Will felt horrified at Jack. He was fairly certain he was, but he didn't think this would be good for Abigail, or him.

"We have no way of knowing what's waiting for her when she gets home."

The room stayed silent.

___

Will stepped out of the car, looking up at the Hobbs house. Abigail ran out from behind him, and he was vaguely aware of Hannibal and Alana getting out behind them.

Cannibals.

Abigail took in a shaky breath as she stared at the grafiti. Phantom whined and nuzzled her hand. It was enough to make her look away, she tangled her hand in the dogs fur and took a breath. Abigail looked back and gave a wobbly smile to Will, and he returned it from her side.

"Can… Can I hold onto him?" Will nodded, handing the leash over to her. He gave three clicks, Phantom recognizing the release from his side. He followed Abigail to her front door, she stared at the words, burned into her past.

"Is this where my mom died?" She asked, looking down at the red stain.

"Yes." Will spoke simply.

"I was sort of expecting a body outline in chalk or tape."

"They only do that if you're still alive and taken to the hospital before you finish the crime scene." Abigail gripped the leash, tears welling in her eyes.

"Goodbye Mom." She turned and entered the house. Hannibal came to stand behind Will, putting a comforting hand on his back.

"Considerate of you to lend your hound."

“She needs it more than I do.” Will explained.

“Are you certain? You have to ensure your own care to ensure hers.”

“I have you here don’t I?” Will smiled in his direction, eyes kept over his shoulder. Hannibal returned the smile.

“Yes, you do.”

Will and Hannibal followed Abigail into the house, Alana behind them. She smiled warmly at Will, happy that he was letting himself depend on others. He tried his best to smile back.

Abigail looked around her kitchen, the boxes and blank walls.

“If you want to go, you just have to say so and we’ll go.” Alana assured her.

“Go where? The hospital?”

“For now.”

Abigail looked back at the turned around photographs, stroking Phantoms head absently. “I think I’d like something like this.” She looked at the dog smiling. “He’s nice.”

“His job is to keep me stable and functional in public. I chose him out of my others because he was the biggest and listened the best to my commands.”

“Could you help me train one for me?” Will was about to respond, but he felt a hint of surprise, worry. Hannibal.

“Will?” Alana asked. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, yes, I’m sorry. Yes I’d be happy to help.” He gave a sort of smile. She nodded, happy.

“Who turned all the pictures around?” She asked, tracing the paper on her fridge with her fingers.

“Crime scene cleaners will do that.” Alana answered.

“They did a really good job.” Will smiled, feeling humor from the girl. She had a morbid sense, as was expected from what she had gone through. He did too. “Is that where all my blood was?” She asked, gesturing towards the floor. Very dark humor. She was laughing on the inside.

“Yes.”

“You do this alot? Go places and think about killing?”

Will stared at her, off her shoulder, remembering her father's mindset and reading her. Saw the survivalist hiding behind an innocent girls eyes. Not innocent to Jack. “Too often.” He finally answered, realizing her intentions and plans, the source of Hannibal's mild panic. But

did she want safety, a family that wouldn't turn on her, or vengeance? Did she mourn her father, love him, blame Will for the tragedy that befell, or was she grateful? Will couldn't quite tell, but he knew to tread carefully.

"So you pretended to be my dad?"

"And people like your dad." He took a step forward, placing a hand on Phantoms head.

"What did it feel like?" Will paused. "To be him?" Alana was in the room this time, he had to tread carefully, or she would be taken away.

"It feels like…" Will took a breath. "When I become another person, a killer, I am talking to their shadow suspended on dust. I am… seeing through their eyes, see their associations, memories, emotions associated with places, or people. I see their hands, as my own, and feel why they do the things they do."

"No wonder you have nightmares. You watch your own hands take lives against your will." She took another step towards him.

"The attacks on you and your mother were different, desperate. Not planned out and purposeful, not a vent to the urges he tried to keep buried but an end. Your dad knew he was out of time, somebody told him we were coming."

"The man on the phone?" Abigail asked, alarm in her tone.

"Do you remember his voice, enough to recognize it?" There was a tilt of something Will couldn't place to Hannibal's words. The worry was ever present, gnawing away at Wills calm demeanor despite the Doctors best attempts to keep it buried.

"I had never heard it before."

"It was a blocked call, you're sure it wasn't anybody you knew? Maybe seen or heard in passing?"

"No, not that I remember." Abigail seemed very certain.

"Was there anybody new in your father's life? Someone you met, or someone he talked about?"

Abigail had a spike of panic now. Phantom leaned further into her to comfort her. "Abigail, he may have been contacted by another killer. A copycat." He watched her reactions.

"Someone who's still out there?"

He nodded, quietly confirming. That wasn't why she had the panic however. *The copycat never met Garrett Jacob Hobbs. Abigail went with him on his hunts. She had nothing else she could do.* Will swallowed this information for a freakout in Hannibal's office later, he wouldn't let Jack destroy her life. She didn't have a choice. In his mind she was still innocent.

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Will stepped outside for a minute to clear his head. Alana sat inside with Abigail and Phantom, going through boxes in the living room. Hannibal assisted for a moment, before going out to join Will.

“Are you alright?” He began, not wanting to too badly disturb the hunched over empath, whose back was against the wall.

Will’s eyes opened and flicked over to him, and Hannibal got the feelings of being seen straight through as always. He looked back out over to the woods.

“She’s innocent.” He was in denial then. Not wanting to believe such a young girl could do such horrible things. Hannibal knew better.

“And the copycat?”

“Never met Garrett Jacob Hobbs. But somehow knew to warn him, he was two steps ahead.”

“Perhaps. Maybe he figured it out and wanted to see what would happen.” Will was a bit too smart for his own good. Hopefully his needs will keep him blind, or in denial.

“Set him off without any knowledge that the FBI was onto him?”

“Yes.”

“And it was just dumb luck that we were-” Will shook his head. “No. He knew.” Will turned and went back into the house, shaking slightly. Hannibal turned to follow him. Abigail was being very crafty, she had begun to sink her nails into Will, twisting him away from her truth and into a position where she could use him to keep her safe. Maybe even use him to take her fall. Hannibal needed to ensure her plans lined up with his, before she decided to break Will.

“Folie à deux.” Alana said as they stepped back into the house. “It's a french psychiatric term. Madness shared by two.”

There was a sweet scent in the air. Doctor Lecter had some worries about Will. “One cannot be delusional if the belief in question is accepted as ordinary by others in that person’s culture or subculture, or family.” A gentle push at her, that he was a friend. That she could trust him, should they have the same goal.

“My dad didn’t seem delusional. He was a perfectionist.”

Will breathed shakily. This was harder on him than it was on Abigail it seemed. “Your dad left hardly any evidence.”

“Is that why you let me come home?” The panic in her voice was manufactured brilliantly. “To find evidence?”

“It was one of many considerations.” Hannibal answered when she looked to him, and he debated whether or not she was useful to him after all. She may prove to be more of a hindrance in the long run, the way she was pushing Will was not how he needed to be broken.

“Are we going to re-enact the crime?” Abigail stood up. “You be my dad, you be my mom, and you be the man on the phone!” Hannibal froze. Had she recognized him? He looked to Alana to stop her, Will needed to have his own person clear in his mind, as he was. He didn’t want Garrett Jacob Hobbs, he wanted Will Graham.

“Abigail, we wanted you to come home to help you leave home behind.”

Abigail sat back down, looking at the stuff in the boxes. She held a old picture in her hands. “You’re not gonna find any of those girls you know.”

“What makes you say that?” Will asked.

“He would honor every part of them. He used to make plumbing putty out of elks bones. Whatever bones are left of those girls is probably holding pipes together.”

Practical. If ever he had to get rid of Will, he would attempt to honor every part of him as well. Someone who was so valued, such an equal, deserved as such. As he kept Miriam Lass for her abilities. However he would never elevate others who were not deserving of such: only Will, no look alikes turned into art by association. Hopefully he could just send him off kilter, enough that Will would clutch to him so desperately that he couldn’t get on his own feet enough to turn him in, not until he wouldn’t want too if he could.

“Where did he make this putty?” Perhaps more bits of girls would be found there, some scraps not used, not honored.

“At the cabin.” Of course. “I can show you tomorrow.”

“Abigail, there’s someone here.”

“Hey, Abigail.” The girl in the doorway spoke, smiling gingerly at Abby. She looked similar, and he wondered if she was to be the next victim.

The two went outside, and Alana went to call Jack and update him. Will and Hannibal watched them from the house, and Will held Phantom again.

Hannibal made a note of his reliance on the furry beasts, seeing that as a likely way to win him over further.

“It seems we will be going back to the cabin tomorrow.”

Will groaned. “Don’t remind me. The atmosphere in that place is a nightmare.” Hannibal wondered what Will would think of the one in his basement.

“Would you like to have dinner with me again tonight?” He found himself hopeful at the aspect of a companion, someone to hold closely and be held in return. Will would see him, it was only a matter of time, he just needed to place things so denial and acceptance would keep Will close.

“Oh, shit.” Will was looking out the window, someone had just appeared, taunting Abigail. Will rushed out, and Hannibal followed, feeling a bit peeved that their conversation was interrupted. How awfully rude of the redhead. The man spat at them and ran when they began their approach, Will reaching the girls first. The scent of blood was in the air.

“Abigail, Marissa, are you two hurt?” Will looked between the two, checking them over for injuries.

“No we’re fine- He said he was somebody’s brother.” Hannibal heard the footsteps of a woman as Marissa’s mother came running down the hill, grabbing her daughter.

“Marissa, come home.” She was worried, rightfully so.

“No.” She responded simply.

“Come home!”

“Can you stop being such a bitch?” *Rude.* He was being put in an awful sort of mood. First, Nicholas Boyle ruins his chance to ask Will to have dinner, and now Marissa treating her poor worried mother so horribly when she tries to keep her safe. He would kill to have that care and worry, unconditional love above all else.

“See you later.” She said bitterfully to Abigail, unaware that this would be the last time she saw her friend alive.

“Bye.” Abigail kept her head down. Will moved past her to look around where Nick had been, checking for anything out of the ordinary. Hannibal covered the the rock with his foot, making a note to return to collect the tissue. Time to hit two birds with one stone.

“He’s gone.” Will assured her. “You’ve never seen him before?”

“No.”

“Let's go back to the hotel. We’ll go to the cabin tomorrow.”

“We should report this, yes?”

“Yes.” Will briskly walked away. Hannibal sighed. His plans for tonight were ruined.

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“What do you mean you only have two rooms?”

Maybe his plans weren’t ruined.

___

Will sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. Alana was on the phone with Jack, who had decided to save funds by booking only two rooms, both with two beds at least. He was going to have to share with Doctor Lecter, his psychiatrist, who would probably analyze how he slept and relate it to some trauma about his past.

You have near constant night terrors from a fear of being something wrong and different, instilled in you by your father from a young age who didn’t understand the way your brain worked and had resentment towards your abilities as they are what made your mother abandon the two of you.

Will was not looking forward to this.

“Abigail, do you mind sharing with me?”

“No Doctor Bloom.” Alana smiled.

“Will you three boys be alright?”

Will chuckled. “So long as Phantom doesn’t climb in Doctor Lecters bed instead of mine, I’m sure we’ll be fine.”

He didn’t need empathy to see the absolute horror that thought put through the Doctor.

___

“Do you want to order take out for dinner?” Will threw his jacket down on one chair, putting his suitcase on the bed by the window.

“We can eat in, I did bring enough for us to share.” Will chuckled.

“Right, picky diet, no junk. Don’t let me stop you from eating your fill.” Will knelt down and began undoing the straps on Phantoms harness, the dog sitting still long enough for him to be relieved before licking all over Will’s face.

“I packed enough for two. I had intended to share with you Will, I believe a better diet may help your health.” Will snorted, hearing the disgust in his tone as he watched Phantom coat his face in spit.

“My health is fine.” He said as he stood up. “But I’m never one to turn down a free meal, especially when you’re the one offering.”

Hannibal smiled, a quirk of the lips that was almost invisible. “I believe that was almost a compliment, dear Will.”

“Yea, almost, don’t get your panties in a twist.” He plopped down in the chair across from Hannibal, and watched as the Doctor took out two fancy looking tupperwares for them, and then a third.

“A dog-friendly version of our meal tonight.” He explained. Will felt his heart skip a beat. “May I?”

“Go ahead, just make sure he sits first.” Hannibal did, looking a bit disgusted when Phantom licked his face as he knelt down to feed him. He sprang up and walked to the bathroom, washing it off.

Will laughed, it was painfully obvious Hannibal was trying to earn his trust through his dogs, and didn’t have any clue what he was doing. Nobody else had ever taken such efforts for Will before, and it made him feel a bit warmer in his chest. The murders and instability weren’t so bad when he finally had human friendship. Tomorrow hopefully he was going to be eating dinner with Beverly, and talking about this. Hannibal stepped back in, and apologized.

“It was rude of me to leave so suddenly.”

“No, you aren’t used to these guys, it's fine. That was his way of saying thank you.”

“Perhaps in the future I will teach him to give me a handshake instead.” Hannibal still seemed positively *affronted* by the dog licking him.

“You do that.” Will giggled. “I too, shall excuse myself to clean off his ‘thankfulness’ before I eat..?” Will asked as he headed to the bathroom.

“An Italian cold pasta salad with salami, olives, mozzarella, tomatoes, and parsley coated with a dressing I made myself.”

He stepped back in, drying his face with a towel. “Fancy.”

“Simple. I could show you how to make it if you like it.”

Will laughed. “If you’re so determined to fix my diet why don't you just start filling my fridge with food and feeding me every meal.” He joked, starting to eat. This salami tasted a bit strange. Will wondered if it was homemade, like the dressing and presumably the pasta as well.

“That sounds like a wonderful idea Will.”

He choked on the food in his mouth, swallowing it down quickly. *What?* “Doctor Lecter, I was-”

“You will have to inform me more of your tastes, or shall we explore what excites you together?”

Now he *knew* he wasn't just reading an innuendo into that.

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Will showered first, Phantom climbing in behind him as he always did. He dried himself and then the dog to the best of his ability, changing into his boxers and shirt in the bathroom and pretending to sleep once Hannibal finished. It was a rocky night, and he tossed and turned for most of it, Phantom tucking into him and calming him down enough to slip into a sleep haunted by nightmares. He pseudo-awoke to the ravenstag, sometime late, leaving the hotel room.He followed it. They were in the cabin.

He was holding Abigail, telling her it was going to be okay, he was gonna make it all go away. He cut her throat. Screaming filled the air, and then silence. He sat in a clearing, a stag head for a table. Cassie Boyle was laid out as the main course. He looked across from him, a tall man with black skin and a rack of antlers across his head, skin bone tight and sunken in. White eyes peered back at him, and he awoke to Hannibal shutting the door to their room in the dark, Will was drenched in sweat and tasting blood.

"Will, you're awake."

"What time is… Why are you awake? Where were you?"

Hannibal sighed. "You were thrashing an awful lot in your sleep. I went to a nearby pharmacy to see if I could obtain some sleeping medication that might assist you-"

"I- at 4 in the morning?" Will looked at him, blinking sleep from his eyes whilst Phantom lay across his lap, trying to calm Will down.

"You are my friend Will. Would you like to take my bed for the rest of the night? Yours cannot be very comfortable in your current state- it's absolutely soaked. Please, take a shower and try to get some more rest."

"No, no, it's fine. I'll get some towels, please don't worry about me. You need more sleep, you've been up longer."

"Once in a while is no issue for me, Will. Your lack of sleep has become a permanent fixture. I insist." Hannibal stepped closer to him, rubbing his arm gently. Phantom watched the contact, tenseing.

"Shh boy. You may want to refrain from touching me, he can get snappy when I'm like this." Will threw the covers off, trotting into the bathroom for some towels.

"Nonsense. You need it and I trust Phantom to know I'm a friend." Hannibal pat the dog, setting the small bag down on the table.

"What, Doctor Lecter, are you going to hug my insomnia and nightmares away?"

Hannibal gave a quirk of the lips, before pulling him in tenderly and stroking his hair. Will ought to know better by now then to joke.

He relaxed into the hold, raising his arms to the doctors shoulders, eyes sagging. Maybe he didn't. Maybe he shouldn't ever learn. This was nice. Will sagged against the Doctor, falling into a dreamless sleep.

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The alarm woke him up next, 7:30 flashing in bright letters. Hannibal had changed back into his sleeping clothes, and Will blushed when he realized he also had been changed into Hannibal's pajamas. And he was in Hannibal's bed. He sat up from where he lay with his head on the Doctors chest, Hannibal rising with him.

"You slept soundly I note. No more bad dreams?"

Will looked at where Phantom was laid out at the foot of the bed, trying to ignore the thought at the back of his head that he had slept more soundly in the arms of a killer than he did surrounded by his pack. "No, no more." He stroked the dog, Phantom stretched and yawned, a high pitched sound coming from his mouth before he rolled onto his side next to Will.

"I tried to keep him off the bed, but he wouldn't stop complaining about not being next to you. It was sweet, in a way."

"Dogs keep a promise a person can't." Will echoed Alana's words. He looked at Hannibal, a bit peeved to find him sleep free and looking as immaculate as ever. He watched Hannibal get out of the bed, going into the mini fridge for the breakfast he had presumably brought.

"Unconditional love and loyalty. No matter how horrid the actions you commit, even against them, many will never turn on their master if provided with even scraps of love." He lay out three containers, and Will chuckled.

"You know I remembered to bring Phantom food, you didn't have to bring some for him."

"I enjoy sharing my cooking, especially with one so obvious in their enjoyment." Will knew that the real reason was to win Will's favor. Hannibal had taken a liking to the way his mind worked. He had plans for him, and those plans needed his trust.

"Do you want me to go see if they have coffee at the continental breakfast?" Hannibal looked slightly disgusted. "Do you want me to see if they have hot water because you probably brought your own fancy stuff?"

That earned him a small laugh from the Doctor. "If you would be so kind. I'll search for a means of re-heating our scramble. They don't have a microwave in the room."

Will gasped dramatically as he pulled on his pants. “How dare they? It's almost as if this isn’t even a four star hotel!” He paused. “Why are you staying with us in this rinky place anyway?”

Hannibal smiled. “I wanted to get to know you better.”

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After they had gotten ready in the room, they met Alana and Abigail by the car at 8:30. They piled in, Hannibal driving to the cabin Will was dreading to see. A few officers accompanied them, removing the tape so the four of them could access the cabin easily.Will stepped inside after Abigail, the emotions and energy left behind overwhelming him. New ones as well. The stench of death.

“He cleaned everything.” Abigail said as she looked around. “He said he was afraid of germs, but I guess he was just afraid of getting caught.” She reached back for Phantom.

“He has to stay in the car. This is a crime scene, he could contaminate the evidence.” Will explained when she turned around to look for him. He understood the feeling she had, he was a good touchstone.

“Can I go back to him if things get… too much?” She asked.

“I’d insist on it.” Alana said. She put a hand on Will’s shoulder, conveying that it applied to both of them.

“Did anyone else ever come here with your dad Abigail?” Will asked her, looking around the cabin. The feeling he was getting was too fresh, too present to be an echo. What was it? “Except you.”

“He made everything by himself. Glue, butter…” She trailed off, looking sick. “He sold the pelts on ebay, or in town. He made pillows. No parts went to waste.” Horror, disgust, those were expected. What wasn’t was the admiration. She looked up to him. “Otherwise it was murder.”

She whipped around to look at Will, disgust and horror in her tone and words. “He was feeding them to us. Wasn’t he?” An odd emotion came about the room, snuffed before Will could identify it. He stopped himself from looking at Doctor Lecter, stopped the questions he had. That fascinated the Doctor at the least, but there was something else as well.

“It's very likely.” The accented voice carried throughout the room, and he stepped a tad closer to Will. He very likely noticed the unease Will was putting out. Will smelled fresh blood.

She gagged. “Before he cut my throat,” The words shook as they tumbled out of her mouth, choking on air, “He told me he killed those girls so he wouldn’t have to kill me.”

“You’re not responsible for anything your father did Abigail.” Alana stepped in and said firmly.

“If he would’ve just killed me, none of those other girls would be dead.” She wasn’t acting, Will could see that. Many things she did fake and hide, but she truly did not want to act on her father’s will in this case. Alana saw her as completely innocent. He would have to work to keep her that way.

“We don’t know that.” Alana said calmly. “Your father-”

Drip, drip, drip.

So that's the smell. Blood was leaking from the second floor.

Will ascended the stairs, gaze falling upon the corpse of Marissa Schurr. He felt a tugging at his heart, a feeling of guilt, start deep inside his chest. Her blood looked black where it dripped to the floor, the twisting antlers framing the crime like art.

Numbly, Will reached for his phone, the scene so fresh that the emotions seeped deep into his skin. He called for ERT, reaching with a handkerchief to pull her head up, confirming her identity.

Too late he heard the steps up the stairs, Alana calling to Abigail before she saw something horrid. He heard her scream peirce the air. *Too late.*

“Marissa!” Her voice was broken, choked off. The last shred of her happy past snapped in an instant. The grief was overwhelming, the sorrow and distress. He turned, letting the head fall, and walked out, brushing past Hannibal back to the car, where he sat next to Phantom.

Distantly he heard Alana and Hannibal comforting Abigail, escorting her out of the cabin. She went to Phantom as well, and Will mused at how easily she had become attached to him. The guilt pulled more at his gut as he took in her mournful sobs, heaved into the dog he leaned on.

Will stared at the corpse hanging off the wall, Hannibal close next to him. His presence was grounding, keeping him from spiraling out of control.

“Do you think she knew the guy down by the stream?” *Could he have done this?*

“Somebody’s brother.”

“Not somebody. Abigail said that he asked if she helped take his sister’s lungs while she was alive.”

“The young woman on the stag head.” Doctor Lecter’s face showed concern, but Will felt fascination from him. Hannibal helped him think, asked questions that were just right to help

him along, never shouting them or overwhelming him like Jack did.

“Whoever did that, most certainly did this.” Will mused, looking at the girl. He felt a sharp feeling of pride, Hannibal was pleased he came to that conclusion. Hannibal loved how his mind worked, the jumps it could make. It pleased him to no end. Will wondered how pleased he would be when he identified and looked at Hannibal’s own work. “Cassie Boyle. She had a brother, Nicholas. But Garrett Jacob Hobbs didn’t kill Cassie Boyle.”

“I know. Garrett Jacob Hobbs would have honored every part of her.” Doctor Lecter put a comforting hand on Will’s lower back, gently rubbing in soothing circles. Will found himself relaxing, shaking off the scene a bit more easily than usual, especially considering he was still a foot from the body.

Jack’s voice snapped him out of his calm spell, putting his nerves on high alert. “You bring Abigail Hobbs, back to Minnesota, to find if she played a part in her fathers murders, and another girl dies.” There was no Phantom to keep him safe this time, only Doctor Lecter. He hoped he would be a good buffer.

He heard Doctor Lecter move closer behind him, shielding him more from Jack, and he distracted himself by looking in Marissa’s mouth, finding soft tissue.

“He scraped his knuckle on her teeth.” he felt Hannibal behind him, leaning over his shoulder to look more closely at the body. “There’s foreign tissue, and what could be trace amounts of blood.”

He heard Jack take a step closer. “You said that this copycat was an intelligent psychopath Will, that there would be no traceable motive, no pattern. He wouldn’t kill again this this way. You said-”

“I may have been wrong about that Jack, people can be wrong.”

“Garrett Jacob Hobbs never struck his victims.” Jack began to raise his voice. “Why would the copycat do it?”

“I think he was provoked, this may have been unplanned.”

Will furrowed his brows. “He wasn’t going to, but her death was necessary and this was a poetic way of doing it?”

“Nicholas Boyle murdered this girl, and his own sister.” Hannibal came to the conclusion, turning to Jack.

“With or without Abigail Hobbs?”

“Without.” Will said easily as he took a breath, looking at Doctor Lecter. He had successfully redirected Jack from his anger, and shielded Will from another outburst near effortlessly. He wondered how hard it would be to bring Hannibal onto the team with him permanently. He may be able to keep up with this if he had both his hound and the psychiatrist by his side.

“Well, do you think that Abigail Hobbs knew Nicholas or Cassie Boyle?”

“No.” Will stared at the body some more, this wasn’t that simple. He had gotten a bit of a reading off Nicholas, and he didn’t think he was capable of these murders. He had been wrong before about them however, so he wasn’t going to say anything. Unless another one happened he wouldn’t worry about it.

“You don’t think she knew them?” Jack started walking forward, Hannibal taking a step to shield Will more thoroughly, “Or don’t want to think she knew them?”

“She said she didn’t know them.” Jack sighed. “Abigail loved Marissa deeply, she was the only friend she had left Jack. The only person still on her side, defending her, Abigail wouldn’t take her life for anything. Marissa threw a rock at Nicholas, she was scared he was going to hurt Abbigail.”

“Doctor Bloom says that Abigail as a penchant for manipulation, is she manipulating you Will? Who's to say she wasn’t manipulating her friend?”

“Agent Crawford.” Doctor Lecter stopped him, Will didn’t have to see his face to know the look Jack was being given.

“Look, he said he was wrong about the Copycat Killer I’m wondering what else he’s wrong about.” Jack took a side-step to reach around Hannibal to Will and Will took a step back behind Hannibal. He popped an aspirin, his head pounding behind his eyes. Will didn’t want to look at this anymore. He had a feeling he wouldn’t like the answers he found.

“Whoever killed the girl on the field killed this girl, I’m right about that.” Will made an exit towards the stairs, wanting to be done with this whole thing. He stopped. “He knew exactly how to mount the body, wound patterns are almost identical to Cassie Boyle,” A brutalish slaughter, a pig. He knew this killer, it wasn’t Nicholas. He held his tongue from saying that however, not sure why. “The same design, the same…” he didn’t take anything this time, that was odd. Off for this killer, he always took something. He could feel it, it’s one of the reasons he killed- to take. They didn’t deserve the parts. “Humiliation.” Why didn’t he take anything? Will stood at the top of the stairs, the answer just out of reach. Who was he, he knew this killer, he *knew* them.

“Abigail Hobbs is not a killer. But she could be the next target of one.” Hannibal walked over to him, putting an arm gently around his shoulders and walking him down the stairs. The bullet points and profile bounced around Will’s head, the shadow of the Copycat standing in front of him, white eyes and black antlers. Jack was following them, talking to Hannibal, but it was white noise to Will. Why couldn’t he *see?*

“... escort her out of Minnesota please?” Will turned to Hannibal to see him nod, about to help him into the car-

“Not you Will, I want you here. You can put Phantom in my car.” Will’s heart dropped.

“I believe it would be best for Will to take a small break from this. He can wait in the car with his hound while we collect Abigails things, and then rest at home. Let him sleep, he didn’t do so well last night.”

Jack huffed. “Do I get a say in this?” Will asked, cracking a bit of a smile.

“Doctor’s orders.” Doctor Lecter opened the car door, guiding Will inside and shutting it behind him. He walked over to collect Abigail and Alana, Jack trailing behind him and talking to him. Will chuckled as Phantom licked at his face, mussing up his hair. Hannibal moved quickly and confidently, Jack struggling to keep up and try to convince him Will could handle more time here. He called Beverly letting her know what happened. She sighed, and assured him that they'd just have to spend two nights together next weekend to make up for it. She fed his pets for him, making sure they were well taken care of, and said she may still be there when he gets back but she’d be sleeping in her own bed tonight.

He lay back in his seat once everyone was in the car, and let himself fall into sleep as they started the drive back to the Hobbs residence.

___

Will awoke to the noise of the press outside the car, it was dark out, and they were pulling into the driveway at the house. He yawned, having slept well, and went to unbuckle his seatbelt.

“Stay here Will, we will only be a few minutes.” Hannibal put a hand over his, before getting out of the car with Abigail and Alana. He sighed, and once the three had moved away enough he wouldn't be scolded, he whistled and patted his lap. He laughed as the oversized dog clambered out of the backseat and into the drivers, laying half in his lap and panting happily.

He saw the woman rush by, heard her cries through the open window.

“You killed my daughter!”

Alana tried to stop the young girl from rushing to Marissa’s mother. “Abigail!”

“Why did you come back here?” She screamed, held back by Hannibal. “Why come back here?” Her sobs pierced the night, the grief of a mourning mother. Will held back a sob of his own, reaching up to find his eyes wet. He looked down at the dog, a wet tongue coming up to lick it away.

Damn empathy.

Abigail looked horrified, and traumatized, as Alana and Hannibal escorted her back to the house. He made brief eye contact with Doctor Lecter, unsurprised to find no sympathy of any kind there. It was detached, not in the way Alana or Abigail were, but more so he didn’t find any horror or anything at all- he comforted her and acted so he wouldn’t be excluded as wrong or broken- or something much much worse.

Hannibal kept walking, and so the moment was broken, and Will let out a shiver of fear at what he saw lurking behind fancy suits and a caring facade. He wondered if he actually cared

about Will, or was just acting that way to ensure that when Will did come across a crime of his own making, he would help Doctor Lecter hide rather than help the FBI find him.

Will found he didn't really care if the gentle touches and warm meals he received were fake, he was just happy to be receiving them.

Freddie Lounds was the next obstacle, shouting back at Abigail, she looked at Will in the car, Phantom giving a rough bark. He looked back as she was escorted by Hannibal and two officers, at the whispering between Freddie and Hannibal, wondering if perhaps she would be the first he'd find dead by the Doctor's hands. Abigail went into the house, Alana and Hannibal staying behind to talk to police. They had been very efficient at ensuring nobody talked to him, which he was grateful for immensely. They went inside, Will texting Beverly on his phone. He looked up, Hannibal coming out and saying that they had been attacked by Nicholas Boyle-

Will grabbed the leash, hopping out of the car and rushing to them. Alana was still knocked out, but Doctor Lecter had been struck and Abigail had been attacked.

He stayed with them while they were examined, blood under Abigail's fingernails taken and sent to the lab. Jack arrived shortly after.

Hannibal took Abigail and Will, starting the drive back to Baltimore. Jack had promised to call as soon as Alana was up, but Abigail needed the comfort of the dog. Hannibal seemed anxious about something, and an odd smell hung in the air.

"I should have come in with you guys, Phantom and I would have probably caught him and then we wouldn't have to worry about anything."

He looked in the rear-view mirror, Abigail sleeping soundly.

"You've been around enough murder and horror Will, and I wouldn't have risked you or Phantom for a chance at maybe catching him. Abigail will be in a safe place, guarded from him, and you and I have nothing to worry about."

Will looked out the window, watching the scenery go by. "Thank you for buffering me from Jack."

"Jack doesn't know your limits. I have a much better idea of them."

Will contemplated inviting him onto the team, but it occurred to him that they really only needed one possible serial killer on Jacks unit and the good Doctor had put himself in more than enough danger.

"Keep it up and he's not going to let you be my psychiatrist anymore. He wants someone who will tell him I'm fine and keep me in the field. Not tell him the truth and keep me sane."

"Ah, but we are just having conversations. I am not being paid to see you Will. The FBI won't have records of what we talk about, as they would if they were paying me, and I can talk to Jack about what goes on, as is legal because you are not paying me."

“They… they aren’t paying you?” This was news to Will. He thought he had to go see Doctor Lecter, that the FBI were paying him. After the first session, that wasn’t the case.

“No, we are merely friends having conversations.” Hannibal reached out and held his hand, extending a smile. It was genuine, actual joy coming off him. He had a feeling he didn’t have many real friends.

Will sighed. “It’ll be much nicer to see you knowing that it's my choice to do so. As friends.” The hand holding was nice. He supposed europeans were closer, like in America how girls act when they're friends, that it was probably okay for guys there too.

He tightened his grip and closed his eyes, leaning back. Europe sounded nice, if it meant he could hold hands with his stupidly attractive friend and have that friend not think it was weird or crossing bounds. Maybe Hannibal did care for him genuinely after all.

Chapter End Notes

So, not so much of a slow burn, whoops. Also you can reach me at my tumblr, hellhoundlover666!

Cuef

Chapter Summary

Jack tells Will that Phantom is too unmanageable. Hannibal and Will take the next step.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Phantom lounged by Will's feet, no longer preoccupied with watching Doctor Lecter's every move. Will was more relaxed as well, sipping at his wine whilst talking with the older man across from him.

"Sometimes, at night, I leave the lights on, in my little house. I walk across the flat fields, and when I look back, from a distance, the house is like a boat on the sea." Will smiled, pictureing it in his mind's eye. "It's really the only time I feel safe."

"You stood in the breathing silence of Garrett Jacob Hobbs's home. The very spaces he moved through. Tell me, Will, did they speak to you?"

"With noise and clarity."

"You could sense his madness, like a bloodhound."

Will tried not to laugh, his nose was sharp enough to sense Hannibal's as well. A more refined murderer. Kills not for the need, but out of a sense of duty. "I tried to hard to know Garrett Jacob Hobbs. To see him." Will felt nausea build up in him, remembering his mindset. He killed the innocent for no good reason, other than they looked too much like a daughter who he wasn't even really losing. "Past the slides and vials, beyond the lines of the police reports, between the pixels of all those printed faces of sad dead girls." He wondered what Hannibal would look like, when he did the same for him. He could hear hoofbeats in the distance. *See?*

"How did it feel seeing Marissa Schurr, impaled in his antler room?"

"I felt… guilty." His hands shook. The concept of killing didn't distress him, but the taking of an innocent made him feel sick.

"Because you couldn't save her?"

"Because it felt like I killed her, and took her from Abigail." His voice shook as he leaned forward in his seat. "I got so *close* to him. Sometimes, I felt like we were doing the same things at different times of day, like I was eating, or showering, or sleeping at the same time he was."

Will was only vaguely aware of the sharp note of jealousy that came from the man across from him. “Even after he was dead?” The words seemed to echo, Will drifting a bit too far away.

“Yeah, even after he was dead.”

“Like, you were becoming him?” Will snapped out of his trance.

He looked up at Hannibal, a odd sort of smile on his face. His design wouldn’t be dead innocent girls impaled on the severed heads of dead bucks. If ever he found reason enough to take a life, he would elevate them into art, equivalent to the design of their own. “I know who I am, I am not Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Doctor Lecter. I wouldn’t kill innocents, like Garrett Jacob Hobbs.”

“I am not suggesting you would. We both know Nicholas Boyle killed those girls.”

“Did he? Did he really? Because I have many doubts about that.” Will stood from his seat walking over to Hannibal’s desk. “Nicholas loved his sister, I felt his grief, he wouldn't have the capacity to defile her in that way. She was his world.”

Sympathy. That made Will stop in his tracks. The Doctor felt sympathy towards Nick, towards his loss. That was… out of character.

“I could see him killing Marissa, but not Cassie. Someone is trying very hard to frame him, and knows how to do it.”

“Who?” Hannibal asked, and it felt again like the answer was staring him in the face.

“He thinks it's Abigail. He wants revenge, wants to kill her. It’d be smart not to mention to Jack my little theory, at least until more evidence is found. Otherwise he may come for Abby.” Doctor Lecter had a pleased air about him, he liked the choice Will made.

“He thinks Abigail had a hand in her fathers murders, and is shaping up to be worse than him. He wants to prevent worse tragedies from befalling.”

“A vigilante against a victim. Abigail may have helped her father but she had no other choice. It was them or her and she did her best to survive. She was a victim, and should be treated as such.”

Surprise, and joy. The hope was even stronger now, *he was trying to build a family with them.* Will smiled, hidden from Hannibal. That meant he could play Hannibal right back, convince him he didn’t need remoulding to fit in. Maybe this was his shot at happiness too.

“I agree. Another secret to keep from Uncle Jack?”

“In good faith, Doctor Lecter. We’re just having conversations, you have no obligations to say the exact subject matter.”

“Indeed, omission is not lieing.” Hannibal stood, with his glass and Will’s, refilling both. He handed Will back his, and he took it in hand, taking a swallow.

“Still one of the most illegal things I’ve ever done.” Will joked. Hannibal chuckled, and said nothing as he took another sip.

___

The lights were already on when he came home, the spare key Beverly had coming into use again. The door opened as he got out of his car, dogs rushing to him and barking happily. Phantom hopped out behind him, greeting his friends and Beverly waiting in the doorway.

“Brought some extra company tonight.” Salem stretched and yawned from his perch around Bev’s shoulders, the auburn black cat blinking slowly at Will.

Will blinked back, recognizing the affection as it was given. “Sounds like fun.” He walked up and into his house looking into the dining room.

“But see, Star Wars has so much more action, and intense romance! Han settles down in the end, you don’t see Kirk doing that.”

“Actually, he has been in one the entire series. Kirk and Spock have been in an open polyamorous relationship-”

“No, that's a headcanon, Jimmy, headcanons don’t count.” Will smiled as he took in the scene, the two locked in a quick argument. Gremlin sat between the two like a judge seeing a case, the sphinx wearing a bright red sweater and matching mittens. It let out a happy mew at seeing Will, the sweet cat leaping off the table to climb up Will’s leg.

“Hello Will!” Price greeted enthusiastically. “You’ve seen Star Trek right? At least, enough to know it's better than Star Wars?”

“Can’t say that I have.” He lifted the cat into his arms, loud purring filling the room. Gremlin was the loudest of his cats, as well as the most affectionate. He enjoyed sweaters and outfits as long as they were tight fitting and soft like a hug, and as long as any new articles were rolled about in Will’s dirty laundry first.

“But, you have seen Star Wars, right?”

Will nodded. “I’ve seen the first one.”

“First as in first released or first as in prequels?” Will blinked dumbly. What was the right answer here?

“Could you two not ambush him in his own home? He gets enough of that from Jack.”

“Yes but I’d rather movie trivia then murder motives.” That earned him a laugh from the others.

Bev pulled a dvd out from the bag she brought. “Everyone into uniform, we’re watching Titanic.”

An collection of groans filled the room. “We do that *every* movie night. We’re not doing it sleepover night too.” Zeller protested, even as he grabbed his ‘uniform’ and went to the bathroom.

“Speaking of, Will, you’re coming to next movie night right?”

Will blinked, startled. He had expected any other events to either exclude him or be invited to by Beverly, Price reaching out was new.

“Where?”

“My house, Wednesdays. Though it is a work night, we still have fun.” Beverly stated as she shoved the fluffy clothes into his arms over the cat, steering him into another room.

“I’ll try!” he called back, shutting himself in his study. He changed quickly, thinking over his newfound social life. It was still so new and odd, he didn’t want to screw anything up. Maybe he could suggest a classic.

—

“You mean you three have *never* seen The Room?”

Beverly laughed, looking at the copy in his hands as they followed him upstairs. “I’ve heard of it, but no, never actually seen it.”

Jimmy smiled. “Now I know this will be better than Titanic.”

Will loaded the disk in, the other three settling on the bed behind him. “Mmm, the sex scenes are definitely not.”

Brian rolled his eyes. “They can’t be that bad, Will. You’re just hypersensitive because of your empathy.”

Will settled next to Beverly, hitting play. “God, I wish.”

—

As the credits rolled, Will got up and uncapped the whiskey, taking a few shots straight from the bottle. The other three were still in a state of shock.

“I think the thug was the best actor in the film.” Beverly was the first to speak.

Will chuckled. “Yea. I don’t think Wiseau knows what cancer is though.”

“Will, we are never letting you pick another movie.” Brian was very serious, looking at him. Will shrugged, he really couldn’t blame him.

“I also have A Dog’s Purpose, if you want eye bleach.”

“ *Please.”*

Will laughed, storing away the cursed DVD and taking out the better movie. It was fun, all curled together with various furry friends around them or on them, watching TV until the sun came up and they collectively passed out in a heap.

Will still awoke shortly after, nightmares starling him into consciousness. He looked at the faces of his snoring friends, wondering why their presence hadn’t calmed his mind like Hannibal’s had.

___

By Monday Will had left for another case, Hannibal being tasked with the chore of feeding the herd of furry friends Will house. He pulled up to Will’s quaint little house in Wolf Trap, no other homes for miles. Secluded, isolated, wild, much like the man that lived here.

The barking began when he was spotted by a cat, the ginger and white feline meowing loudly and the dogs going off and scratching at the door. Hannibal shuffled through his mental list of the descriptions, behaviors, and names Will rattled off to him about his entourage, identifying the feline as most likely Scarlet.

He gave the cat a treat, little baked chicken bits with catnip, knowing the better these animals reacted to his presence the better Will would as well. She purred and bumped his hand, running off into the fields.

Hannibal broke up some sausages, as a way to ensure no mauling would happen should he open the door.

The canines barked around his feet, most quieting as he held the sausages and dropped them. A smaller one ran forward, biting at his ankles but was stopped when a full link was dropped in front of him. He watched the dogs chase after the smaller voracious one, jealous of his bounty. That one must be Buster.

He waddled carefully through the cats that were left, making his way upstairs to their feeding area. He set the bag of sausages down, to pull out the cat food-

And the bag was knocked over, a small red cat ripping inside and eating the bag. The remaining sausages where eaten by what was quite possibly the *largest* feline Hannibal had ever seen, the cat twice the size of Buster easily. Brown fur and a striped pattern along with the size told him that this was Wolf, and the cat eating the bag would be Maroomba. He finished feeding the cats, and then the dogs, and then explored the rest of Will’s house,

He would be able to learn much from this, to influence his friend better, to help him *be* better.

Every flat surface but the desk and the table had some kind of bed on it, there being a cat tower in every other room. The desk was covered in fishing equipment and lure making supplies, telling him what Will did for much of his free time. All the books were well read, trinkets having no artistic value, all being chose for sentiment. Pictures were of landscapes or pets, and he went to the piano in the corner. A few notes told him it was out of tune, but the keys were well used and the music was difficult. He made a mental note to get Will to play for him sometime.

His thoughts were interrupted by several keys going off and a rather loud meow, the only hairless member of Will's hairy family making his appearance as he jumped on the piano. He gave the cat a few gentle pets, and went to snoop about in Will's drawers. The top drawer was open, a calico with muted coloration sitting in the spot. A quick glance into other draws showed them well organized, and his closet was full of cheap clothing. Furniture was chosen for availability rather than aesthetic, and the dog beds were made of a finer material than what he clothed himself with.

Will obviously had a self esteem problem.

He looked back to the lures, formulating a backup plan. Should their family fail, he didn't want to lose Will. Having a friend behind the veil with him was too much to resist. Framing him and having him easily accessible behind bars was tempting, keeping him isolated from all comforts aside from Hannibal.

But only if it took him longer to accept himself than it did to see Hannibal. Even now the clock was ticking on his time with Will. He only hoped he could move quickly enough to ensure their happy ending.

___

"What do you see, Will?" Jack's voice snapped him out of his trance, and he lowered his hand. He observed the dead sitting at their table, noting that while he felt adrift with Hannibal or Phantoms presence, at least the team was close enough to him to keep him grounded.

"Family values." His chest hurt, repressed emotions and memories welling up to lodge themselves in his throat.

"Whose family values?" Jack was trying to be gentler, quieter when he asked him these things. He had a feeling Hannibal had talked to him about over-stimulation and how to best keep Will in working order for longer.

He half listened as Jack gave him the facts about the case, three kids, one went missing about a year ago. An abduction. He looked at the picture of the child, emotions seeping through the photograph and into his mind. “False faces in family portraits. Layers and layers of lies, betrayed by a sad glint in a child's eyes.”

“Norman Rockwell with bullet.” Price took another picture, flash startling Will more into the present.

“Alright, any signs of forced entry?”

“No broken windows or torn screens, it's all sealed up tight.”

“Yeah, they probably rang the front door.” *Welcomed in with open arms.*

“I got bullet holes on the upper sections of the wall, and again over here.”

“Okay, pull the slugs for ballistics…” Will tuned out again, looking closer at the pictures. Underweight, overlooked, a misfit that blended in. Will could relate to him, without the empathy. He stepped into the photograph, a mother’s love so strong and deep. She adored all of her children, flaws and all, sought to help them and love them and *nurture them-*

Will set the picture back down. There was a lump in his throat. “When was Jesse abducted?”

“Uhh, a little over a year ago.” Jack looked back at the scene, wheels turning in his head. He was coming to the same conclusions.

Ungrateful.

___

“I’m glad we didn’t have guns in my house. Would have shot my sisters just to get ‘em out of the bathroom.” Brian joked. Jack was the only one in the room without a smile on his face, even Will chuckleing. They had left him behind in their team bonding.

“I liked having a big family.” Beverly said. “I adore my baby sister.”

“My parents gave me a gift- a twin! Who wouldn’t want two of me?”

“I’m sure Brian wouldn’t mind.” Bev winked.

“Let me guess,” Brian turned to Will, walking up with a smile on his face. “Only child?”

“My dad had dogs instead of other kids. Grew up with a bernard named Clyde.”

“Explains your hoarding.”

“Hoarding?” Will laughed. “Yeah, and siblings made all of you turn out perfect.”

“Hey, family friction is a catalyst for personality development- I bet your worst friction was who gets the biggest bone.”

Will didn’t laugh at that, near weeks spent with nothing more than scraps on his plate, the dog hunting for himself to eat and bringing Will food that wasn’t safe but he cooked and ate anyway- there was nothing else but the half eaten squirrel Clyde had found on the side of the road.

“I was the oldest, so all the friction rolled downhill.” Beverly smiled at him, an attempt to make him more comfortable.

Jack jumped at the chance to be included. “Yes, all the attention and responsibilities heaped on first-born children prepares them for success in the future.”

“Maria got away with murder. She had ‘em all fooled. Helped me get away with plenty too- learned that her tears got my parents to do anything. Even be nicer on me.”

“I thought middles were the problem.”

“Nah, middles the sweet spot.”

“Always trying to figure out where they fit in.” Will pitched in. “They can be great politicians, or lousy ones.” Zeller laughed. Will felt a lot safer in the lab now, the only danger here was Jack.

“All the victims have defensive wounds except for Mrs. Turner.”

Looking at the photo he was handed, everything Will suspected was proved right. “There’s forgiveness.”(*‘ That boy isn’t right!’ Will buried his face in Clyde’s fur, he had seen too much- too much*)

“What kind of victim forgives the killer at the moment of death?” (*‘He’s our son!’*

‘He’s a monster, he plucks your sins from your head and serves them back to you on a platter! He’s got the devil in him!’)

“A mother.”

—

“Will.”

Will turned to face Jack, about to make the drive to Baltimore. He was having dinner with Hannibal tonight.

“If you’re going to be consulting with us regularly,” He sighed, looking away. “Phantom is a bit too…”

“My dog?”

“I am putting in a formal request that you replace him with a calmer, smaller, less vicious dog.”

“On what grounds?”

“He nearly took the head off of Eldon Stammets, he has snapped at me before on numerous occasions, and Freddie Lounds has also put in a formal complaint of a bite.”

Will scoffed. “He did no such-”

“Will, I can make it go away so at least you get to keep him, if you keep him at home and bring something else.” Will bit his tongue, looking back at his dog.

“Fine.” He briskly got in the car, ignoring anything else Jack had to say, and started the drive up to Baltimore.

___

“Tell me about your mother.”

“Some lazy psychiatry there Doctor Lecter.” Will chuckled. “Low hanging fruit.” Phantom yawned, rolling over. Will took another bite of his meal.

“I suspect that fruit is on a high branch.” Will noted how Hannibal took the wine by the stem of the glass, smelling it before sipping. Will found himself mirroring him, not missing the way a pleased feeling entered the air. “Very difficult to reach.”

“So is my mother.” (*Vocal development left Will talking with his hands and pictures, handing his mother a question.)* “I never knew her.” (‘ *Why don’t you love father anymore?’ It said. ‘Why do you love someone else if you’re married to him?’ Will had seen her with another man without ever* seeing her *with another man.)*

“Tell me about your mother, lets start there.” Will countered. (*‘Mama left because you’re different, Willy. We gotta hide those differences so nobody else does.’)*

“Both my parents died when I was very young. The proverbial orphan until I was adopted by my Uncle Robertas when I was 16.” Something dark lingered around the name. Dead as well. Not the whole story. Understanding flashed behind Will’s eyes. Dead by Hannibal’s own hand. His parents were something much darker, with much more pain. Whatever happened to them shaped Hannibal into what he was.

Will hid the shaking of his hands by clenching tighter to the chair. A dark satisfaction lingered around the kill of his uncle. Will was seeing with clarity through the person suit.

There was someone else, more parts to the story which cause more heartbreak. The real motivator that cultivated the monster.

“You have orphan in common with Abigail Hobbs.”

“I think we’ll discover we have a great deal in common with Abigail Hobbs.” Will chewed thoughtfully for a moment, Hannibal retracted further back into the suit, becoming obscured once again. The meat tasted strange. “She’s already developed an aptitude for the psychological.”

“Something so foreign about family… Like an ill fitting suit. I never connected to the concept.”

“You created a family for yourself.” *Like you are trying to do, Doctor.*

Too early to show his hand just yet. “I connected a family of strays. And thank you for feeding them, while I was gone.” He choked up a bit, reminding himself of what had transpired earlier with Jack. Phantom whined, leaning into his leg for comfort instead of to beg. He set his utensils down.

“I was referring to Abigail.” Hannibal furrowed his brows, concern flowing off him in waves. “I sense something is upsetting you deeply, I can only imagine it must be the memories this case is bringing up. But, it may be something else.”

“Partly that, partly…” Will sighed. “Freddie got herself bit by some dog and has put a formal complaint on Phantom, saying he is aggressive and vicious, and-”

“And this could lead to his end.” Dogs could be put down for biting people.

“Jack said he's unmanageable and wants me to replace him with something smaller and better tempered.” Will was expecting outside sympathy, but not real. The emotions he got from Hannibal were confusing and surprising- he was outraged by this. He hid it well, but the spice of anger flowed evenly through the air around him.

“He wants your beast to not stand up for you, to simply be there to catch you but not to stop you from falling.”

Will mirrored the anger easily, feeling his hands itch to maim. “Does he even understand how hard it is to train an ESA? And he wants me to have the replacement ready by next week.” Will put his utensils down to gesture with his hands.

“I would be happy to assist you in picking a new support from your pack. And paying for top of the line classes as well as registering the replacement.”

Will reeled a bit, shock clear on his face. “I couldn’t ask you do to that-”

“Jack is going to force this on you, and as your friend I can’t help but want you to have the best support you can. Phantom is preferable, but if little else we can take this in stride.”

“We?” Will knew it wasn’t just a slip of the tongue- Hannibal wanted him to think of them as a unit.

“Yes. You cannot think I’d leave you to handle this on your own. I am the most qualified to help you with this situation out of all your friends, Katz, Zeller, and Price are far more equipped to deal with scientific matters.”

“They aren’t my only other friends- Alana could help me with this.”

“Alana doesn’t have the same funds at her disposal that I do, though I don’t doubt our shared want to see you in better shape.”

“Be careful Doctor Lecter, you’re going to spoil me.”

“I will try my hardest.” Will laughed, taking another sip of wine. His heart beat a little faster. His closest friend was a killer, and the more time they spent together the less Will really wanted to do anything about it. “Tell me about the Turner family, Will.”

___

Will let his dogs out, looking over them. He supposed Winston would be the best fit, the dog gentle and kind even to the squirrels the others chased. He also followed Will everywhere already, and listened to the commands he was given as they left Will’s mouth. He watched the brown dog jump around Phantom crazily, jumping on him periodically and rolling around.

Phantom would hate the change.

Winston was already the first waiting back at the door, sitting for him. He looked up at the roof, the window he left open so the cats could have access in and out housing Whiskey. He sighed, walking back inside and getting the tape measure, preparing to order the new vest for Winston.

___

Will was talking about sexual assaults, one of his *favorite* topics. It disgusted him to no end, the fact that others would think they had a claim on somebody else's body without their permission.

It was cut short by Jack, entering the room and shouting. Winston gave a squealing bark by the desk, as it was still his first day and he had yet to receive training, but Phantom was no longer allowed and there was no way in hell he was going in alone. He shushed the dog gently.

“Who is this?”

“Winston. You’re making it difficult to provide an education, Jack.”

Jack gave him the brief, another missing kids prints in the turner home. A pattern was starting to become apparent, as he loaded himself and his dog into Jacks car with the rest of the team and Winston and started the drive to, presumably, a crime scene.

___

Merry Christmas.

Will looked at the dead bodies in the lab. Something went wrong with the Frists. Connor was left in the fire for dead.

“Shooting her once wasn’t enough, first bullet traveled beneath her scalp to it's final resting place as the base of the neck.”

“And it still didn’t kill her.”

“Hydrostatic shock of shell hitting skull would’ve caused brain damage.”

“Her body went into convulsions.” The pieces fell into place.

“Shot her again. Put her out of her misery, different gun.”

“Someone else shot Connors mom.”

“So who is the additional corpse in the fireplace?”

Will rolled his eyes. “That’s Connor Frist, Jack. He was prepared to kill his mom, not watch her suffer. He couldn’t take it.”

“Conor couldn’t put his panic back in a bottle so he got shot too.”

“Whoever shot him disowned him.”

___

Will was working on his computer, late night, still in his classroom. Hannibal had insisted on taking care of Winston’s classes, and so tomorrow morning he was going to be driving to some snooty high end dog trainer in Baltimore, prepaid and specialized. After that they had arranged for the sessions to be at the same time as Will’s appointments, and then he would pick up Winston after dinner with Hannibal. He needed to talk to Beverly about changing sleepover nights to Saturday night.

“Ever heard of Willard Wigan?” Speak of the devil. “He’s this artist that does micro-sculptures, like, putting the Obamas in the eye of a needle. He’s so focused that he can work between beats of his heart, I guess archers do the same thing.”

“Fascinating.” Will was trying to read, but his interest was more caught on what she was saying.

“What are you looking at? Doctor Lecter’s facebook? Didn’t take you for the stalker type.”

“What?” He turned to her, seeing the smile on her face and the playful glint in her eyes. “No, Bev, we’re just friends. A-and I’m looking at the kids. Jesse and Conor, both are small, underweight for their age…”

“You think there’s a connection?”

“I’m thinking possible ADHD diagnoses for both boys- Ritalin, Focalin, any medication containing methylphenidate can affect appetite and slow long term growth in kids.”

“Another thing about Willard Wigan, he had a lonely childhood. He used his tiny sculptures as an escape.”

“They may have escapes as well.”

She smiled. “Price got a hit on the ballistics-matching program he’s been running on the two family murders. The bullet that put Mrs. Frist out of her misery matches three used in a murder in Bangor, Maine a year ago. Mother of a thirteen year old boy, shot to death with her own gun.”

“Thirteen year old milk carton material?”

___

“C.J. Lincoln disappeared six months before his mother’s murder, hasn’t been seen since.” Jack summarized the report in front of them, recapping for the team.

“He has none of the characteristics of a sadist or sociopath.” Will wondered if Hannibal did. If he was going to keep his friend, he had to figure out just what killer he was.

“Right, no shoplifting, no malicious destruction of property, no assault, no battery. He was kind to animals, for god’s sake.” They were missing something.

“The firearm says we’re looking at Peter Pan to our lost boys.” But what made him Peter Pan? He could have just been like that- Will didn’t have any of the marks of a psychopath either. But he hid because of his empathy, the chances C.J. had something similar were too small. Something changed him.

“But it takes a sophisticated level of manipulation to convince young boys to kill their families in cold blood.”

“Kindness to animals doesn’t suggest that particular kind of sophistication.” There was a different ringmaster here.

“Well he’s older, he’s been out in the world. Maybe he picked up a few things.

___

Will ran as fast as he could, he didn't think the clerk picked up on the small child looking way more puffy than any child wearing that terrible of clothes should be, but Will ran regardless.

His father would be proud of him, taking food for maybe even half a week under his coat. Bread and cheese and sausages were the meat of what he grabbed, he even got milk and a few eggs in his pockets!

Clyde met him halfway up the road in front of the little run down cabin by the lake he and his father shared, close enough to the boatyard that he could be in early every morning. Will unloaded the contents of his jacket and shirt onto the cool table they had in the corner, covered with a damp cloth. He took the cheese and bread and made himself a snack, giving some bits to the dog as well.

It really sucked for Will that his father spent every penny they had on hard liquor, but he could get himself by on stealing and whatever Clyde brought back. The nine year old had learned to ration and even could fish a bit, saving some sausage and cheese to tie on the fishing line his dad sometimes kept around. It was hard, but worth the trouble to get up so early and catch food. Breakfast was the most important meal of the day after all, and Will was a growing boy.

When red pooled in the water it made such pretty *patterns, too.*

___

Will dropped Winson off at the training place, the lady smiling and assuring him she'd take care of it and give him a breakdown of everything in the lesson when he came to pick him up, and that he could come by anytime until tomorrow morning.

He wondered just how much this whole thing cost, the place expensive and lavish. He didn't even know that places like this existed- the one-on-one ESA training offered at what appeared to be a five star dog resort.

“Good evening Will.” Will looked up from his satchel, at the pesky brown package he had bought. He had spaced, distracting himself with Winston rather than the *thing* he had brought. He stood, about to walk into Doctor Lecter’s office, giving a single whistle-.

“Oh, yeah, right,” Will frowned. Hannibal furrowed his brows.

“Please come in.” He stepped aside, giving a welcoming smile. Will took a breath. The dog didn’t just make him more comfortable- it was his tie back to himself. He could always reflect the dog instead of whatever the room’s mood was at the moment, as a safeguard. Walking into the lion's den without his shield was not very safe.

Will smiled back, hoping he wouldn’t lose himself to whatever the Doctor was, and stepped by him inside. His missed the clack of claws behind him, blunt nails scratching on hard floors. He decided to see just how much he could get away with without some of Hannibal’s patience being used up by the dog. Measure how much he was actually worth. He had some steam to burn off anyway.

He threw his stachel, indiscriminately down on the sofa, the gift sliding out a tad. He wrinkled his nose at it, a horrible *stupid* idea, an unwanted show of affection, as all of his shows were. Unwanted.

“Has christmas come early? Or late?” The doctor made a joke, the holiday having passed several weeks ago.

He took of his coat. “It was for Abigail.”

“Was?” Hannibal took a step closer to him. He threw his coat on the couch.

“I thought better of it, I wasn't thinking straight, I was…” Will took a breath. “I was upset when I bought it.” He began to pace. “Maybe, I still am.” His voice cracked and he winced.

He watched Hannibal take the gift gently, adjusting it in his bag neatly. “What is it?”

“A magnifying glass and Fly-tying gear.” Hannibal stood up, walking over to where Will fidgeted with a fancy letter opener he found on Hannibal’s desk.

“Teaching her how to fish.” A reassuring hand placed itself firmly on Will’s back, applying weight to a pressure point. Will relaxed slowly, fighting the sensation. “Her father taught her how to hunt.”

“Precisely why I thought better of it. Hunting and fishing too similar, too many bad memories with one for the other to be of any sort of enjoyment.”

“Feeling paternal, Will?” Hope. Again. The man was like a kicked puppy. Will found he had to consciously remind himself that the perfectly quaffed doctor was capable of assuredly horrible things. This was shaping up to be the Alana situation again- only so much worse.

Worse because any tiny move could be taken the wrong way. A hand extended in friendship could be taken for a hand raised in attack- a snake waiting to strike.

Revealing what he knew even by a *bit* would spell disaster for him. He had to win Hannibal’s trust before he revealed what he knew, and before Hannibal pushed him far enough to break him or decided he wasn't worth the trouble.

Will relaxed into the hand behind him a bit, glancing into the Doctor's eyes.

“Aren’t you?”

Hannibal moved a bit closer. “Yes.” Joy. Hannibal had gotten a tiny step further in his plans and he was happy. It was a nice feeling to be around, one usually he only got from his dogs. He found he didn’t have to reflect it for it to show up in his own heart as well. “Our good friend Doctor Bloom had advised against taking too personal an interest in Abigail’s welfare.”

“Our good friend Doctor Bloom doesn’t even take too personal an interest in her friends.” Venom shaped and curved words into knives, Will shocking himself with their edge. The dogs usually kept his darker nature quiet, without them it was beginning to take shape. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what came over me.” He kept his eyes down, stopped trying to read Hannibal for a moment, just to calm himself down.

“Tell me, why are you so angry?”

“I’m angry about those boys,” (*“Please, I can’t raise a toddler on my own!”)* “I’m angry, because I know when I find them I can’t help them,” (*“Then he’ll die and the world will be better off for it! You know better than to keep a devil’s spawn under your roof, he hasn’t been our Willy for a long time!”) “* I’m angry, because I can’t give them back what they just- gave away!” Will shrugged away from Hannibal as his voice raised, old words and painful memories tugged to the surface as his cheeks grew wet and his voice went raw. (“ *Come with me and* leave *him here, Bill. Nobody will know, and we can try again. Try again and hope the second one isn't replaced with a monster like he is!” Will cried, not fully understanding the words, but the meaning behind them clear.)*

“Family.”

“Yeah.” Will quieted his words, blocking out his mother’s voice. “We call them the lost boys.”

“Abigail’s lost too.” Apprehension, hesitation. Hannibal was weighing his next words very carefully. “And perhaps it's our responsibility, yours and mine, to help her find her way.”

“Perhaps…” Will turned back to Hannibal. “My mother, I… I do remember bits of her. I remember she didn’t love my dad, or me. I remember she loved someone else.” Will paused, looking at nothing. “I remember my dad barely functioning or the next ten years after she left. Wasn’t until he got me into middle school that he finally started taking care of things.”

“Was he neglectful to you.”

Will gave a bitter smile. “I was on my own. Until one day I wasn’t, and he was acting like he had raised me closely for the past ten years. Like the only time I didn’t see him drunk was when I got up at 4 am to fish when he went to the boatyard.” Will thought a moment. “Abigail had doting parents her whole life. Now she’s alone.”

“She needs an anchor.”

“Alana wouldn’t approve of us stepping in, especially not legally.” Will smiled at Hannibal.

“I think we both do many things Alana wouldn’t approve of.” Hannibal gave a genuine smile back.

___

“Will, you did *what?”*

Will rolled his eyes at Beverly. It wasn’t that big of a deal, he and Hannibal had just legally ‘adopted’ Abigail. For all intents and purposes, They were her guardians. “She needed somebody Beverly-”

“And that’s totally normal, having a kid with your psychiatrist.” Beverly playfully shoved him as they walked together to Jack's office.

“We didn’t have a kid, we just put our names down to give her some stability and someone to lean on, and, you know, it's better for her to have two parental figures, makes things easier.” Beverly gave him a look. “He’s also not my official psychiatrist.”

She snorted. “Only if you guys invite me to all the family dinners- I hear Doctor Lecter is *very* talented with his hands.” She wiggled her fingers at him in a suggestive manner.

Will wanted the earth to swallow him whole.

___

Will breathed in the case again, the patterns, the clues. He was missing just one thing, that would throw it all together. They just needed to find the next one, before it was too late.

“There's a pattern. Less to do with geography than psychology.”

“What kind of kid does this?”

“And, what kind of kid follows a kid who does this?” Will was so close, he just needed one more piece.

“There’s no indication that these kids came from abusive families..”

Come *on.* “No, no, no. Capture bonding. It's a passive psychological response to a new master. It's been an essential survival tool for a million years. You bond with your captor, you survive. You don't?” Will smiled leaning back. “You’re breakfast.”

___

Will's eyes scanned over the missing kids reports, Winston whining at his feet. The dog walked over to Alana, leaning on her leg as he was pet.

"Without the interference of a leader, these kids would never consider violent action."

"Our missing kid's a boy. A paradox in the midst of a normal family. He's an outsider who doesn't look like one." Will thought. "He'd have a vocation, an escape," He motioned to Beverly, she smiled. "Something inventive or mechanical."

"Here's one." Beverly held up a file. "Family moved from Biloxi to Charleston to Fayetteville in the last three years. He won a junior high award for his work on pretty sophisticated computer circuitry." She handed Will the file. Jackpot, they high fived.

Alana gave the two a strange look. Will stopped smiling and looked back at the file. "Why do you think these kids are susceptible to C.J. Lincoln?"

"Because our boy may have a brother but their ages or interests keep them apart."

"Sometimes you have to make an effort to really bond with your siblings, if they are younger than you. You see them as a nuisance but they really look up to you. You have to be open to them." Beverly looked at some more files.

"You don't and you alienate them. So he's a brother, without a brother."

"Brothers looking for a mother." *Click* . "They're killing the mother's last."

"They're not looking. They're… throwing out the old model."

—

Will walked into Jack's office, Winston and Beverly behind him. He knocked on the frame, Jack looking up to him,

"Not just C.J. Lincoln. There's an adult with some formative sway- it's a woman, a mother figure. She's looking to form a family and she doesn't care what she has to do to ensure that it's a happy one." A chill ran up Will's spine. Hannibal was looking to form a family too. Would Abigail or himself end up in the fireplace on christmas if they didn't fit the mold?

"Family can have a contagion effect on some people. Influences them to adopt similar behaviors and attitudes."

"Whoever this woman is, she wants these children to burst with love for her. But, she has to erase their family to do that."

“So, she abducts them, convinces them nobody can love them as much as she does, then makes damn sure of it?”

Will shook his own dilema from his brain. “A security camera in a convenience store in Alexandria, Virginia caught footage of one Chris O’Halloran this morning, he was with an unidentified woman.”

“Where are this kid’s parents?”

“Fayetteville, North Carolina.”

“Lets go.”

—

Winston whined when he was left in the car, the team rushing out fully armed. Will walked in the rear, keeping his hand on his gun. Will split off as C.J. was shot, running after the kid who bolted for the pool.

“Chris, wait!” Will stayed calm, his heart barley above resting. The kid pulled a gun on him.

“Don’t shoot!” Will signaled to the men behind him. “Hey, I’m not gonna hurt you.” Will put his own gun down, hands up. “You’re home now, put the gun down Christopher. Come here, and this can all be over. Don’t you miss your parents? Your dad? Your actual mom?”

A woman stepped out of the shed, holding Chris close. “Shoot him Christopher.” *Rude.* A distinct thought, not his own. He shook it off, and eyed the gun that she had herself.

“Christopher… Please.” A gunshot sounded, and the woman dropped. Will flinched, Beverly running to him as the SWAT team apprehended the woman and secured the kid.

“You ok?” She kneeled in front of him, checking him over for injuries. Will felt his hands shake. “Can I touch you?”

“I’m not made of glass Bev, I’m fine, I’m more worried about-” Beverly gently wrapped her hands around his shoulders and pulled him in for a hug. Gentle hands stroked his hair.

“You scared me there Will. Don’t do stupid things like that. I’ve seen you shoot, don’t forget. You don’t need any more nightmare fuel.”

—

Will sighed as he walked up to Hannibal's house. Winston and Phantom were both with him tonight, Hannibal told him that they would be eating with Abigail, a sense of a normal conversation. A normal meal. He rang the doorbell. This was going to be the least normal meal he had ever had in his life. He only hoped Abigail didn't hate him.

"Will, come in." Hannibal greeted him, taking his coat at the door. He held up the basket he brought.

"I got some oranges, and strawberries on my way over. You said breakfast, so-"

"These look lovely, Will." The basket was taken and Hannibal squeezed his arm gently. "Abigail is in the dining room, I am merely placing the final touches on dinner. She was experiencing anxiety, so I gave her something. She may be a little off."

"That sounds great, can I have some?" Hannibal laughed, guiding him with a hand on his lower back towards the dining room.

"Perhaps later, if you still require." The doorbell went off again, and Hannibal frowned.

"Expecting someone?" Will asked, letting his dogs off leash. He heard Abigail giggle as Phantom went into the dining room, his hello sounding out quietly.

"Only the three of you. Please, sit and I'll handle it." Hannibal gave a smile, tight lipped and thin. As Will stepping into the dining room, he felt sorry for whoever was at the door.

"Hello Will." Abigail was sitting, gladly having her back facing that monstrosity of a painting. "You brought friends!" She patted Phantom, the dog leaning back into her.

"Yeah, this is Winston, you know Phantom."

She laughed, scratching the brown dog. "Hello Winston! Sit Will!" Will took his seat across from her, smiling as she started to laugh in ernest. "You're like a dog too!"

Will laughed. "I suppose I am. You think Hannibal would buy it if I played dead?"

Abigail leaned in. "Only if I told him you died." They giggled, cut short by heels sounding out loud.

"Rude, Hannibal, Shockingly rude!" *Alana Bloom.*

"I think I may want to do that." Will said.

"Doctor Bloom sounds mad."

"As someone who makes such a big deal about common courtesy, I'm a little taken aback. Slash alot taken aback, that you would take my patient…" Will couldn't quite hear the rest of it, the shouting tapering off.

"When do you think Doctor Lecter will bring out the alcohol?" Will wasn't liking this, either he empathized with Abigail and went loopy, gave into the anger Alana was expressing in

waves, or the extreme anxiety his dogs were having at someone they liked being so mad.

“Rude! Hannibal, Shockingly rude!”

Abigail giggled. Will was given a perfect mental image of the scene in the kitchen- Hannibal being torn apart by Alana, and not being able to do anything because she was right. From what he gathered, Alana did not approve this visit with Abigail.

“What did he give you?” He whispered.

She leaned in, looking from either side as if she was about to share a secret. “ *Mushrooms.”* Will put his head in his hands. Footsteps starting making their way towards the dining room, heels clicking on the floor. The dogs hid under the table.

“Hi Doctor Bloom.” Abigail smiled.

“Hello Alana.” Will turned to her, Phantom barking from under the table. “I had thought that you had approved this visit, evidently not.” He took a sip of his juice.

She blushed, “Will, I didn’t realize you were here, I’m sorry you had to hear that.”

“No, it's fine.” Hannibal walked him a bit after, setting another plate.

“Are you hungry? Hannibal made breakfast for dinner.” Unease. Alana was weirded out. Will couldn’t blame her, this place felt like a death trap. Even the food had an air of darkness about it. Will couldn’t care less.

“I could eat.” She sat down, next to Will.

Abigail was staring at the two of them now, in an odd way. Will felt joy, contentment, ease. He smiled, relaxing into those feelings.

“What is it?” Abigail’s smile grew. “Abigail?” Hannibal asked again. “What do you see?”

Will giggled, Abigail mirrored it. Alana’s fear filled the air, pungent and bitter. “I see family.”

Chapter End Notes

Who is ready for the SNIFF

Coquilles Part 1

Chapter Summary

Will ponders his choices and gets a new friend.

Chapter Notes

This is a two part chapter because it got too big, but the second part is almost done!

Clip, clop, clip, clop.

Will walked, and walked. His feet hurt, antlers pressed deep into his back pushing him forward down the road. His feet smacked wetly on the pavement. A wet nose pressed into his hand.

Lights blurred his vision as he came into consciousness. The police car pulled up as he shielded his eyes, suddenly very cold. His feet were cut up from walking, and the two officers stepped out with a flashlight.

“You lost?”

“What?” He looked around, disoriented.

“What's your name?”

“Will Graham.” He rubbed his eyes, he knew this feeling. He had been sleepwalking again. He hadn’t done this since he was a teenager, stopped needing to lock his bedroom door in college.

“Do you know where you are, Mister Graham?” Will shook his head.

“Where do you live?”

“Wolf Trap, Virginia.”

“Okay, that's good. We’re in Wolf Trap. You’re close to home.” Will shivered and coughed, a low whine coming from behind him. “Those yours?”

He turned, Phantom and Winston behind him. “Hey Phanny, Winston.” Phantom gave a sharp bark, leaning into him. Winston sat, yawning. “Can I sit down? My feet are sore.”

The cop nodded, guiding the three into the back of the car. They got out a first aid kit, and Will cleaned up and bandaged his feet.

“Why don’t we take you home?”

“Ok.” They gave him a blanket, so he wouldn’t freeze to death.

“You on any drugs? Medication? Perscription or otherwise?”

“No.”

“You been drinkin’?”

“No. Uh, yes. Not excessively, I had a couple fingers of whiskey before bed.” Will scratched Phantom, and Winston shifted so he was in his lap.

“You have a history of sleepwalking, Mister Graham?”

“I’m not even sure if I’m awake now.”

They took him back to Wolf Trap, and he closed the door behind him. He locked it for good measure, double checking that his animals were all present and taken care of. The cats were surprisingly easy, waiting at the door and worridley rubbing against his legs, and the dogs greeted them again happily. He double checked that everything was locked before collapsing onto his bed, the worried family around him enclosing him in wagging tails and soft purring.

___

Will drove over to Hannibal's house when he woke up, arriving at 7:00 am. He debated whether or not it was okay to show up unannounced, and then finally made the choice to just go up and ring the doorbell.

Hannibal opened the door, wide awake and in very expensive nightclothes. Will returned the bright smile he was given. He and the two dogs were welcomed inside, and Hannibal made some sort of coffee in a ridiculously expensive looking coffee pot.

“Although I may be, Is it safe to assume you’re not sleepwalking now?”

Will laughed. “I’m sorry it’s so early, I kinda need a clutch for reality right now. And, well-”

“I’m the sanest person you know?” Hannibal looked up at him.

“Not quite. You’re someone who won’t judge just because I have some screws loose, and you happen to have a degree in the mind.” Will smiled. “And you make *really* good food.”

“Well, I always enjoy having someone for breakfast.” A sharp spike of proud humor. Will didn’t see the joke. *Stupid Autism.* “Never apologize for coming to me, Will. Office hours are for patients, my kitchen is always open to friends.” Will watched as he added sugar with one

spoon, but then stirred it with a different spoon. A metal spoon. The other was clear. The mug he was being handed was clear. How much was this coffee set? Who used two different spoons?

“Onset of sleepwalking in adulthood is less common than in children.”

“I haven’t sleepwalked since college, the doctor i saw about it said it was effectively gone.” Will took a sip of the coffee when it was handed to him. “Could it be a seizure?”

Hannibal started a second cup. “I’d argue good old-fashioned post-traumatic stress. Jack Crawford has gotten your hands very dirty.” Will smiled a bit. Hannibal was peeved at Jack, for pushing him. He did care. Or he wanted to break Will himself. Will frowned. Why was he so happy about that? Something to talk about with his dogs in their venting sessions. Who needed actual therapy anyway?

“I wasn’t forced back into the field.”

“I wouldn’t say ‘forced’.” Hannibal met his eyes. “‘Manipulated’ would be the word I’d choose.” *Territorial.* Hannibal doesn’t like other people playing with his things.

“I can handle it.” Will *wasn’t* one of his things.

“Somewhere between denying horrible events and calling them out lies the truth of psychological trauma.” Hannibal got out another spoon to stir his ridiculous coffee.

“So I can’t handle it.”

“Your experience may have overwhelmed ordinary functions that give you a sense of control.”

“If my body is walking around without my permission you’d say that's a loss of control?” Sarcasm dripped from the words, and he leaned back against one of the counters.

“Wouldn’t you?” Will snorted. Hannibal smiled. “I put together a meal plan for you-” Will spit out his drink back into the mug. “As well as prepared the first week.” Hannibal motioned to one of his fridges. *One of,* how many fridges does one man need?

“You’ve done enough for me Hannibal, I can’t possibly-”
“Please, I’ve already made it, and cooking is one of my greatest passions. Ensuring a good friend eats better is worth the extra work, if it could even be called that.”

Will opened his mouth to make a joke about moving in, but remembered his track record with that and shut his mouth. “That's… really nice of you. It's more care than anyones invested in my well being than I can remember ever being shown.” He looked Hannibal in the eye. “Thank you.” The emotions he received in return were overwhelming. Hannibal put a hand on his cheek, stroking softly with his thumb.

“Anything for a dear friend like you.” Hannibal removed his hand and walked away, leaving Will reeling. Europeans were *weird.* “Sleepwalkers experience difficulty handling aggression. Are you experiencing difficulty with aggressive feelings?”

Will shook off the contact, deciding not to point it out or make things weird for his *friend* . "You said Jack sees me as fine china, used only for special guests. I'm beginning to feel more like an old mug."

Hannibal picked his cup back up, irritation fluttering through the air again. "You entered into a devil's bargain with Jack Crawford, it takes a toll."

"Oh, Jack isn't the devil." Will rolled his eyes, taking another step towards Hannibal. Jack was more of a vengeful god, sending Will after demons too much. If anyone where the devil, it'd be the ripper.

"When it comes to how far he's willing to push you to get what he wants he's certainly no saint." Will tightened his grip on his mug as fear shot through him at the wave of anger Hannibal let out. He'd forgotten, just for a moment, what Hannibal was. The icy chill of fear, the murderous intent that surrounded them so easily, made him remember. Doctor Lecter was unstable. He just hid it very well, barley a micro-expression making itself known on his face.

Will wondered if he really did want to take Hannibal's side. The man was possessive, territorial. He saw Will as an asset right now, what happened when he wasn't anymore? Or even worse, if his use went further than just him being fascinating. Will didn't want to think about why his heart skipped a beat at that prospect.

___

As they sat in the car, Winston between his legs, he debated telling Jack his worries about Hannibal. Arguments for would be lives saved, possibly his own life saved, arguments against were- Jack isn't very nice to Will and Hannibal is the only one who sticks up for him and still treats him like a person. Other than Alana, but she still hurt to think about, much less see on a regular basis like Hannibal. Hannibal pretended to care enough about him that he could ignore the fact that it was *pretend.* Winston whined when they pulled up. What happened with Phantom didn't make Will want to be especially nice to Jack either. He had taken in much of the anger Hannibal let out that morning, he was going to snap at something.

Tired and grumpy, Will followed Jack to the hotel room.

"Room is registered to a John Smith. Big surprise there."

"An appalling failure of imagination."

"They paid cash, there are no security cameras on the premises- Another big surprise."

"Great. John Smith one of the victims?" Will felt around in his pockets for his aspirin.

"Mister and Misses Anderson according to the register- Mutilated and displayed." Oh, great. Will was *not* in the mood to be dealing with- "I thought it might be the Chesapeake Ripper

but there were not surgical trophies taken." *Thank god.* "I'm gonna need you to prepare yourself on this one."

"I'm prepared."

"Prepare yourself some more. It's soup in there." Jack had an edge of urgency, fear to his voice. Will felt such stress- whatever was in there was bad.

"Soup isn't good for the soul?" Will found himself getting more sarcastic as his mood worsened.

"Not this kind." Will sighed, trying to let out some of the anger he kept harboring. It was hard to just let it go, his exhaustion and fatigue not letting him focus on getting out the foreign emotions towards Jack. "Alright, there are no jurisdictional rivalries here- the local police begged us to take this. Where is your head?"

Will let out a bitter laugh. "It's on my pillow, I didn't sleep."

"Got just the thing to wake you up." Nausea crept up Wills chest. He wanted to go back home. He tended to lose himself when he did this too much- this was starting to border on *too much.* What normally remained dormant as untapped potential for truly horrifying crimes started to bubble up and fester- motivations that were not his own starting to shape his actions.

Will wanted his first kill to be of his own design.

He walked into the room, seeing the angels kneeling and praying. He took a breath.

"Ok, I'm awake."

"Hooks were bored into the ceiling. Fishing line was used to hold up the bodies. And, the wings." Will searched his brain for the horror that should be there. He couldn't find it. Just a mild appreciation, and *that's* where his horror came from. He wondered why he was still struggling with a want to be normal. He wasn't ever going to be.

"At least we know hes a fisherman."

"And/or a Viking." Jimmy stood up.

"Vikings do this?" Zeller was feeling a bit sick, horrified.

"Vikings used to execute christians by breaking their ribs, bending them back, and draping the lungs over them to resemble wings. They used to call it a 'blood eagle'."

"You never run out of fun tidbits, do you Jimmy?" Will joked, walking a bit closer to the scene. "Are pagans mocking the god-fearing?" Will looked closer.

"Then whos mocking who?"

"No he isn't mocking them- he's transforming them." Will's feet hurt.

“I don’t know if it was a good night's sleep, but he slept here. Hair on the pillow and the sheets are still damp. He’s a sweater, maybe you can relate.” Bev joked at him, the team snickering.

Will didn’t share the joke, losing himself in the emotions and scene around him. “Madness slept here last night…” A dull thudding sounded in his hears, a clicking noise. Like hooves.

“He threw up on the nightstand.”

“Couldn’t stomach what he did. Flop sweat and nervous indigestion.”

“Not nervous. Righteous.” Will walked closer, the proud feeling still hanging in the air, and an underlying sweet fear. “He thinks he’s… elevating them somehow.” Will took a breath. He’d have to look deeper. “I need a plastic sheet for the bed.”

Will lay back on the sheets, and let the pendulum swing.

___

This is not who you are. This is my gift to you. I allow you to become angels.

And now, I lay me down to sleep.

___

“Death makes angels of us all, and gives us wings where we had shoulders, smooth as ravens claws.”

“Robert Frost.”

“Jim Morrison.” Will corrected. Zeller huffed, Beverly smiled.

“Even a drunk with the flair for the dramatic can convince himself he's God. Or the Lizard King.” Beverly joked as she looked at the cuts on the back of the body.

“God makes angels, Jesus was especially fond of fishermen.” Jimmy walked over to the two at the table, mulling over the file. “We talking hardcore Judeo Christian upsetting, or just upsetting in general?”

“This is a very specific upsetting.” The more Will looked at the bodies, the more that feeling of dread in Will’s chest grew. The killer was very afraid of something.

“Increased serotonin in the wounds is much higher than the free histamines. So, uh, she lived for about fifteen minutes after she was skinned.” Someone had a very similar style. Two someones. The Copycat and the Ripper. Three separate cases in Baltimore, and yet all of them have to be this monstrous and two within the same time period that Will was working in the field. He cursed his own luck.

“Power residue on the neck of the soda bottle shows Vecuronium- scotch and soda and a paralytic agent.”

“Kneeling in supplication at the feet of G-dash-D.”

“Supplication is the most common form of prayer. Gimme, Gimme, Gimme.”

“They weren’t praying to him.” He didn't have that ego, not like the other two did. “They were praying for him. He’s afraid.”

“What is somebody who could do something like this afraid of?”

Will thought for a moment. “What's in his vomit?”

JImmy looked at the file in front of him, “Uh, dexamethasone-”

“That's used for patients with tumors…” Brian interjected.

“Keppra,”

“He was epileptic. Radiation?”

“Gamma Four.”

“Steroids for the inflammation, anticonvulsants for the seizures, radiation for the chemotherapy. “ Zeller put it together, the pieces arranging themselves neatly in front of Will. “Our guy has a brain tumor.”

“He’s afraid of dying in his sleep.” Pride oozed off of Brian more than Will sweat in his sleep. He found his spirits lifted a little bit, stopping himself from falling into the pit of terror at his feet. Will was afraid too- when his emotions and fears matched a bit too well with a killer without mirroring, that was something to worry about. “He’s making angels to watch over him.”

___

Hannibal opened the door to his waiting room, finding the scruffy empath that resembled the dogs he loved to care for so much scratching at his own leg, nervous without the dog. He had obviously just come from work then- he would have brought Phantom if he came from home.

“Good evening Will. Please come in.” He stood aside. Will seemed distant, off as he drifted into his office. Dark circles and lowered eyelids proved a lack of sleep, the man muttering a greeting as he walked into Hannibal’s office. A sweet smell followed him- some sort of fever? He wondered if Will had at all been taking care of himself and eating the meals Hannibal made him, or showering. “How are things going with Winston?”

“His training is going great- Phantom still hates it. Thank you again for helping me with that.” Will looked down, guilt flashing over his features a brief moment. “I need your help on a case. The guy has a brain tumor, has been making angels out of people.” Will chuckled darkly, rubbing his eyes.

“How does he accomplish this?”

“By skinning their backs and pulling the flesh up with hooks. He has a godly faith- giving god these angels and making them pray for him may save him from the inevitable.” Hannibal climbed the ladder to the overhead library, searching for any and all books that may prove themselves useful in this. “I need to know how tumors affect his thinking- maybe even figure out where it is to narrow it down.” It was always fascinating watching Will work- construct the thoughts and hopes and dreams of killers and painting their pictures for the FBI and Jack.

“There is no one and only spiritual center of the brain.” He tossed down a book. “Any idea of God comes from many different areas of the mind working together in unison.” He looked down at Will, flipping through the book. He wondered what his portrait would look like, painted by Will. *Soon.*

“Maybe I was wrong. How do you profile someone who has an anomaly in their head changing the way they think.”

“A tumor can definitely affect brain function, even cause vivid hallucinations. However, what appears to be driving your Angel Maker to create heaven on earth is a simple issue of mortality.”

“Can’t beat god become him?” Will wrinkled his nose, fear soaking through him like a wave. Hannibal regarded him carefully.

“You said he was afraid.”

“He feels, abandoned.” Will spoke, the low timbre and tone usually taken out for describing killers flowing like a melody as he sunk into the right headspace.

Hannibal's eyes flashed, a golden opportunity presenting itself. “Ever feel abandoned Will.”

Will laughed, probably thinking about his lone childhood. “Abandonment requires expectation.”

“What were your expectations of Jack Crawford and the FBI?” A gentle push, hopefully small enough that Will would see him as a concerned friend rather than the deliberate attempt to push him out of the law and into Hannibal’s arms. Will seemed rather dense to Hannibal’s

true motivators so far- choosing not to look a gift horse in the mouth now that he finally had someone supporting him.

The book snapped shut, Will placing it on his desk and looking Hannibal in the eye from his place on the ground. “Jack hasn’t abandoned me.”

“Not in any discernible way, perhaps in the way that gods abandon their creations. You say he hasn’t abandoned you, but at the same time you find yourself wandering around Wolf Trap in the middle of the night.”

Will’s eyes flashed from blue to a stormy grey a slow smile spreading across his face. “Well…” He chuckled, “This should be interesting. Please, Doctor Lecter, procede.”

He was breathtaking, and Hannibal found he needed a breath to compose himself before continuing. “Jack gave you his word he would protect his headspace, yet he leaves you to your mental devices.”

Will furrowed his brow. “Alana said something similar, but Doctor Lecter, it sounds like you’re trying to *alienate* me from Jack Crawford.” He ended with a smile- and Hannibal’s heart skipped a beat- perhaps not so dense after all- he wondered what else he had chosen not to speak up about.

“Alana is often right. I’m trying to help you understand this Angel Maker you seek.” Hannibal turned, putting the book away. Will’s presence always made him react in strange ways- it was interesting to try and stick to his plans. Hannibal still didn’t know just *how far* Will’s dark streak ran- but he did hope for one that at least complemented his own. Even if blood never again touched Will’s hands, he hoped Will would at least see him and still accept him. He was beginning to long for companionship in ways he hadn’t before.

“Well, help me understand how to catch him.”

“If he were a classic paranoid schizophrenic, you might be able to influence him to become visible.”

Will laughed. “What, scare him out into the daylight?”

“Might even get him to hurt himself, if he hasn’t already.”

“If he were self destructive, he-he-he wouldn’t be so careful.” Hannibal almost smiled when Will stuttered, before catching himself. What was happening to him?

“Unless he’s careful about being self destructive, making angels to pray over him when he sleeps. Who prays over us when we sleep?” Will shrugged, and Hannibal moved to step down the ladder. “Are you ever self destructive Will?”

Will scoffed. “I’ve never *hurt* myself I-”

“You don’t have to to be self destructive- you could deprive yourself of meals or sleep or basic care simply because you don’t feel you deserve it.” Will looked away, guilty, as

Hannibal came to stand in front of him. He couldn't stop himself from reaching out and brushing those curls away from Will's eyes. "You deserve so much more, Will."

He took great delight in the bright red that flushed the profilers cheeks.

___

Will looked up at the shirtless security guard, hooks suspending him in flight, and wondered if this was the universe's way of punishing him for keeping his mouth shut to Jack about Hannibal. It wasn't *his* fault that he was so touch starved that he didn't want to give up contact with any of his new friends, or that Hannibal happened to be the favorite among them. Or that Hannibal was a killer.

But what on earth had he done to deserve looking at these sorts of things all the time?

"Hey. So your place tonight when we're done here?" Beverly snapped him out of his thoughts, a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Uhm, yes I-I should think so."

She smiled warmly. "You remember the dog at the Frist household right?"

He remembered the retriever, at the gory scene left on christmas. "Uh, yes, why?"

"Rest of the family doesn't want it. They were gonna drop it off at the pound. I thought you'd be open too-"

"Do you have a dog in your car for me?" Will smiled.

"His name is Rover if you want him." Bev smiled back, warm and kind.

"Of course it is. You guys can help me get him settled at home-"

"Will!" Jack's voice cut through their conversation. "Stay focused. What do you see?"

Will, still feeling somewhat annoyed about Jack and his treatment of him, as Hannibal had brought up again and again and Will was starting to see his point. "A dead man raised as one of God's messengers."

"Why angels?"

"Well, it isn't biblical, his angels have wings. Angels in sculptures and paintings can fly, but not in scripture."

"He's drawing from secular sources?"

"His mind has turned against him and there's no one there to help." Will realized if his mind turned against him after he turned Hannibal in, *no one would be there to help.* He smiled

bitterly- Jack would just use him until he broke him and Alana and Bev and the others wouldn't be able to do *anything*-

"Uh, Jack?" They both turned to Zeller. "Look at this."

"Are those… What are those?" Price did a double take and Will felt sick.

"Somebody got an orchiectomy *real* cheap." Zeller knelt to get a better look at the testicles on the ground, bloody and raw.

Beverly flashed her light up to the security guard, Will saw no blood on the pants or any sign of castration.

"Doesn't look like the victim." She pointed out.

"So they're the Angel Maker's?" Oh, give him a fucking break.

"He castrated himself?" Beverly looked like she was about to laugh, this was insane.

"So he isn't just making angels he's getting ready to become one." Will fought back the nausea surrounding him, everyone there was disgusted and Will was reflecting all of it. "Angels don't have genitalia."

"So what? He's afraid of dying now he's getting used to the idea?" Jack was unable to look away from the balls, Will was keeping his attention elsewhere thankfully.

"He's accepting it, or he's bargaining."

Brian laughed. "Bargaining chips!" He held up the evidence jar. Will caught sight of the unimpressed look on the other two's faces, smiling to himself. He was going to suggest poker tonight then.

"So does this mean that he's done making angels or he's just getting started?"

Will thought, "I don't know." His brain was shutting down, he couldn't think. Couldn't *see.* He rubbed his eyes. This was too much.

"Well, he's not just killing them when he's sleepy, I mean how is he choosing them?"

"I don't know, ask him." He could feel his throat closing up, a panic attack just on the verge- he needed Winston.

"I'm asking you!"

Will felt the anger he had gotten off of Hannibal snap. "You're the head of the Behavioral Science Unit, Jack. Why don't you come up with your own answers if you don't like mine?" The temperature in the alley dropped as Jack's anger sparked and raged. Will felt fear well up in him, a mistimed misstep and now he was going to pay for it.

“I did *not* hear that, did I?” Jack raised his voice, the other three running. That confirmed his suspicions about their help in the event he started to break from Jack’s pressure. He could see it happening- him hiding it until it was too late, and somebody died by his hands, the work feeling all that of somebody else's.

Will’s hands shook as he took of his glasses, deciding that he’d have to get close to Alana instead- she would help, get him out of *this.* He wouldn’t- *couldn’t*- do this anymore. He’d quit when the Angel Maker was caught, he was sure of it. Tip Jack off about his suspicions about Hannibal and then leave and not come back. He’d have a breakdown in the field maybe- make him unfit for field duty, and go to Alana for the evaluation this time. He’d never see a cold body again unless he decided to put it there, wouldn’t have to lose himself in somebody else.

“No, you didn’t. I’m sorry.” Will stalked back to the body, looking up. Why did the idea of turning Hannibal in hurt him more than when Alana wouldn’t look him in the eye?

___

Rover was a bit shy at first, adjusting to the new environment, but he got along great with the other dogs. Will knew a bit of training would be needed with the cats, but other than that he was settled in.

Jimmy ordered pizza while Brian played upstairs, all of them needing an escape from what had happened. Will went to get a deck of cards from a cabinet, and when he turned around Beverly was right there, startling him.

“Jesus!”

“Sorry, I wanted to talk to you alone. Are you okay? I’ve never heard anybody talk to Jack the way you talked to Jack.”

“I was out of line.” Will looked for an out, but she stepped in his way.

“You were out of your mind! My ears rang like the first time I heard my mom use the F word.” She smiled at him as he let out a hoarse laugh.

“Are you okay?” She pressed again. “I know it's a stupid question, considering none of us could possibly be okay doing what we do, but… are you okay?” Genuine concern, care. Will felt tears well in his eyes.

“Do I seem different?” His voice broke.

“You’re a little different.” She touched his arm. “But you’ve always been a little different. Brilliant strategy- that way nobody can tell when somethings wrong.” She smiled softly, taking a step closer. “Is something wrong?”

Will nodded, and she pulled him close, tucking his head in her shoulder. She shushed him gently, and he realized he was crying. She stroked his hair. “This can’t be good for you. I

mean, I know that's obvious Will, but with your mind?" She sighed, and pulled away to hold him by the shoulders and look him in the face. "Promise me you'll get away from this any way you can if it ever becomes too much? I don't care if it's mid case- you drop it."

He looked her in the eye- for the very first time. "It's already too much."

A soft meow came from behind him, Allie jumping up onto his shoulders and rubbing his cheek while purring. Beverly smiled, and took his hand to lead him back to the upper bedroom, Jimmy and Brian already waiting with pizza.

___

Will leaned against the cool metal of the open morgue door, looking at the two bodies. Beverly was standing next to him, humming a soft tune. The sound kept him grounded, kept him from drifting.

"Meet Roger and Marilyn Brunner." Price came over with a file. Will took it, reading it over. "You might recognize them from such lists as Most Wanted. He likes to rape and murder, she likes to watch." *Lovely*. "We got a DNA match, they falsified the motel registry and were driving a stolen car, so it took a second to identify them."

"I wonder how long it took the Angel Maker to identify them. He didn't choose them randomly."

"He knows something about them. The murdered 'security guard' wasn't actually a security guard. He was a convicted felon."

Beverly looked up from the file. "Could the Angel Maker be a vigilante?"

"Vigilantes are pragmatic, they're purposeful; they don't lay down and sleep under their crimes. In his mind he was doing god's work."

"That spells vigilante."

"Playing at god has other advantages. One of them is always being alone."

"So he makes angels out of demons."

Jimmy wrinkled his nose. "How does he know they're demons."

The same way I can look into a man's eyes and know if he is a killer. "He doesn't have to know. He just has to believe." Will decided to not draw parallels between himself and a killer. That would only give him trouble later on.

"So," Brian came up behind him, drawing out the vowel. It was amazing how quickly the atmosphere in the room changed, and Will felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand. He

caught Beverly smirking out of the corner of his eye. Whatever game they were playing, he wasn't going to like it. "What's with the, uh, fancy lookin' food that was in your fridge last night."

"Glass tupperware, in a house full of cats?" Jimmy leaned in a bit.

"And the reason we *always* order out is because none of us can cook." Beverly smiled a bit wider. "Spill it."

Will gaped for a moment, frustrated that his friends were like this. "Doctor Lecter has taken it upon himself to make sure I'm eating properly." Will huffed. "Why did you wait until we were at work to bring this up?"

Price moved to close the door to the open cold chamber, "We wanted to be able to give you a break from the murder talk. We really all are concerned-"

"Don't try and change the subject." Zeller interrupted. "Why is your psychiatrist making you food?"

"Unofficial psychiatrist!" Beverly interjected. "There aren't any papers stating a patient-doctor relationship applies to them, they just see each other every friday at 7:30 and talk. And he's paying for Winstons classes."

Will tried to sneak out of the room while Beverly talked, but very quickly found his exit path blocked. "So?" Brian prompted. Will gave a deep sigh, and whistled. Winston came trotting up, waiting patiently for his leash to be attached.

"No, we aren't sleeping together. No, we are not together, we have never been on anything that could be considered a date, we are friends, I do not think he is attracted to men, you guys know as much as I do." Will went through the answers to every question they could ask him, and saw their faces fall. They let him out, grumbling about it a bit, and he went back to his car to go home.

___

With growing dread, Will realized the real reason he had been avoiding talking to Jack about his suspicions about Hannibal. His hands clenched tighter on the steering wheel, evaluating his reaction to the teams friendly jabs. He *had* developed feelings for Doctor Lecter, and he could see very clearly those being used to manipulate him and keep him blind to Hannibal.

Jack's bloodhound would be rendered useless against whatever killer Hannibal was, and he'd probably never be caught. Or not for a long time. He would be used until he was no longer useful, and then cast aside like a used tissue, and Will found himself unable to do anything to stop it.

He could simply quit, and then stop their sessions and move away. That would be the safest- he wouldn't talk to Jack, just stop. With any luck, Hannibal would not have a use for Will if he wasn't in the FBI and Will would never have to deal with the consequences of the other option.

Will would rather be heartbroken then dead.

Coquilles Part 2

Chapter Summary

> Will begins questioning his morals when finds his plans incompatible with his emotions, and Hannibal has a good night.

Chapter Notes

> Oof this chapter is longer than the first half. Also!!! TW for animal harm, Will's new stray is a bit beat up. Look for the ~~~ to skip it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will felt the sun on his face as he jolted awake, feet scratched up as scabs were torn off from the roof tiles under them. Loud barking and yowling filled his ears, several furry felines pushing at his legs trying to get him to move away from the edge as Phantom and the other dogs tried to climb out after him.

He turned around, shaking his head as he began to shiver, climbing back inside. It was just after 6:00, the sun had barley risen, and he filled the tub with warm water as his pack surrounded him with wet licks and loud purrs. He cleaned and bandaged his feet, making a note to lock the window at night from now on after ensuring all the cats were in.

—

Will pet Phantom as he sat in his car outside Doctor Lecter's office. This was likely their last session, Will had helped all he was really wanting to with the Angel Maker and he wanted to be done before next Friday. Will knew he had to keep his head down and not make Hannibal suspect he had figured it out- he wouldn't make it out alive if he did. Suspicion and then suddenly stopping their sessions would ensure his death.

Will was tempted to look at old cases and put them up to Hannibal, but he didn't want to do any more of this than he had too. Just to know, just too see what design a killer like him would have. Will snapped out of his thoughts, and saw he had been sitting there for fifteen minutes. He cursed under his breath, grabbing the dog he had with him and rushing up to Hannibal's office.

"Will, come in, I was beginning to worry." Hannibal stepped aside, letting Will and Phantom past him into his office.

“Sorry, I started looking at case files in the car because I was a bit early and lost track of time.” Will gave a half smile, and Hannibal returned it gently.

“Your Angel Maker is giving you quite a bit of trouble.” Hannibal pointed out.

“Yeah he is. I haven’t been in that much, I’ve been trying to let Katz and the others do most of the work.” Will reached out with his head, needing to have a clear and accurate reading on Hannibal this entire session. He was almost out of the woods, but all the more reason to be careful. There was a tinge of worry in the air, and Will wondered what was wrong with him to be happy that someone like Hannibal was worried about him.

“You lead the charge before, what’s different this time?”

“Before I wasn’t waking up inches away from ending my life.” That got a bigger reaction then he was prepared for. Actual fear, and a very heavy worry. Enough that Will questioned his initial assumptions about the Doctor, either he wasn’t the kind of killer Will thought he was to be affected by insignificant people dyeing, or he actually cared about Will. Despite Will’s issues with self-esteem and his own hating thoughts, the second seemed far more likely. This was reassuring and concerning. If the Doctor turned out to care too much, any attempt at pulling away from him would be met surely by violence. Why wasn’t he bothered by that?

“You slept walked again? Did you manage to unlock your door? What happened?”

Such an unusual *barrage* of questions, coupled with Hannibal closing their proximity, left Will reeling a bit. He had to block of bit of the emotion around him out, when usually he had to have no blocks up to get *anything* from the stoic older man . “I-I, woke up on my roof. I went out the-the window I normally keep open f-for the cats.” His stutter increased as he was overwhelmed, eyes darting around everywhere. Hannibal pulled back a bit, containing the intense emotions and letting Will breath. “Didn’t realize you cared that much about my-my well being, Doctor, I’m not your patient.”

“I care because you’re my friend Will.” Will rubbed his temples, a headache coming on from the sudden intense display. “Did the other’s not worry as well?”

“I didn’t tell anyone else. I didn’t want them to worry.” He took out a few aspirin, swallowing them down dry. He didn’t miss the way the Doctor’s eyes followed the movement, or the increased worry coming off in waves. Will was forced to face the truth of things. Hannibal *had* taken a liking to him, and he had ignored all of it because he didn’t want to get his hopes up. His hopes up that a serial killer would like him. Psychopaths can’t love, they obsess. And Hannibal had been fixing all his meals and paying for his dogs classes. He had been integrating himself as an essential support post in Will’s life, trying to foster dependency. Will went over everything again in his head, silent. Jimmy, Brain, and Beverly were *right.* He had no way out of this- but Will found he was happy instead of scared.

There was definitely something wrong with him.

“Is it difficult to lie still and fear going to sleep when it’s there to think about.” Will tried not to sigh as Hannibal went back to his cryptic talk, as he loved to do. “You listen to your

breathing in the dark, and the tiny clicks of your blinking eyes."

"I dream more now than I used too."

"Well, your dreams were the one place you could be physically safe, relinquishing control. Not anymore."

Will was only half in the conversation, too busy freaking out in his head. His plans of going off to some boatyard far away with his cats and dogs wouldn't work, he had a chance at something here. But then he reminded himself that that *something* would most likely not be a good something, he had no idea what kind of violence Hannibal was capable of. He didn't strike Will as the obsessively violent, didn't think that would be a motive, but until Will could make a clear connection to a body he would never know. "I thought about zipping myself up in a sleeping bag before I go to sleep but," He laughed bitterly, "it sounds like a poor man's straight jacket."

At least his role in the family Hannibal was creating made more sense now, he wasn't just wanted because he could be a mirror, wasn't replaceable. Hannibal, for whatever reason, just wanted him. Will signed, realizing he would have to go digging through old case files and link Hannibal to one of those, just to get an idea of what he could possibly do and whether or not he and his pack are remotely safe. Or, on the other hand, they could be extremely safe. There was a chance Will could just waltz himself and his patchwork family into a life of absolute luxury and worship and he would never have to see a dead body he didn't want to see again.

"Have you determined how this Angel Maker is choosing his victims?"

"Well, he doesn't see people how everyone else sees them. I imagine he has an ability quite like mine. Can see to the very core of you if you aren't careful. Probably was brought on by the cancer. He can tell if you're naughty or nice, or he thinks he can."

Old unsolved cases, probably clean kills, given by the disgust he felt for Cassie Boyle, definetly has killed before however- Robertus Lecter would be a good place to start, if Will wouldn't be scrutinized then called insane and obsessed for looking.

"So God has given this person insight into the souls of men."

Probably the kill would have a pretentious, I'm better than you feel. May have religious themes. Will almost snorted- he was profiling a murder by the killer, this was a first.

"God didn't give him insight, God gave him a tumor." Will's eyes fell on the statue of a stag in Hannibal's office. The stag he kept seeing. His brain had already made the connection, unconsciously he saw exactly what Hannibal was. But what did he see? "He's just a man whose brain is playing tricks on him." He stepped towards the stag.

"You are not unlike this killer." A bit of sadness, jealousy? Perhaps they'd find the Angel Maker dead, Will mused as he felt the stag statuette.

“My brain is playing tricks on me?” Hannibal is trying to lead him away from the truth of him. Gaslighting him seems to be no issue on his part, if it keeps Will ignorant enough to not question Hannibal’s motives. Too late.

“You want to feel such sweet and easy peace. The Angel Maker wants that same peace. He hopes to feel his way cautiously inside and then find it’s endless, all around him.”

Will’s chuckle died off as a sob built it's way in his throat, perched on the tip of his tongue. “He’s gonna be disappointed.”

“You accept the impossibility of such a feeling whereas the Angel Maker is still chasing it. If he got close to it, that’s where he will look for it again.”

“Not impossible.” Will was silent for a moment. He’d trust his instincts, quit after this case and throw himself headfirst into Hannibal’s arms. Spend his days not caring for a thing.
“I’ve tried to reconstruct his thinking, find his patterns…”

“Instead you find yourself in a behavior pattern you can’t break. You realize you have a choice?”

“What is it?”

“The Angel Maker will be destroyed by what is happening inside his head.” Hannibal advanced behind Will, claws clicking as Phantom followed him. “You don’t have to be.” His voice had a near pleading quality. Will opened his mouth to reassure him, to tell him that he wasn’t going to be working for the FBI after this case even as a *teacher-*

That was too close to his ear to just have been the dog.

“Did you just *smell me?”* Will turned to Hannibal, his eyebrows raised in complete surprise. By the Doctor’s face he was surprised he did it too- or surprised he was caught. Will’s heart was thundering in his chest. Phantom barked.

“Difficult to avoid.” Will scoffed under his breath, but couldn’t stop himself from smiling just a bit. “I really must introduce you to a finer aftershave. That smells like something with a ship on the bottle.”

“Well, I keep getting it for christmas.” Will chuckled, and he attempted to unpack the thick wave of emotions. All new worry, fear, sorrow. Bad things. Did he smell that terribly?

“Have your headaches been any worse lately? More frequent?”

Concern over his health again. Maybe it was obvios he hadn’t showered in a while. “Yes, actually.”

Id change the aftershave…” He seemed to come to a decision on something, taking a step closer to Will. “I was deliberating whether or not to invite you to an opera sunday evening, I have another ticket and if you accept we could go out tonight and find you a better aftershave, as well as possibly a suit for the occasion.” It was spoken like a statement.

“I, uh, well sure if no new bodies turn up. Winston is good until?”

“The latest you will have to get him is tomorrow at noon. Do you mind if I step out and see if my tailor is still in?”

Wil swallowed, his throat dry. “Tailor?”

“Of course, you need a suit. I’ve seen your wardrobe, and it's high time you got a new one. I’ll only be a moment.”

“Right, sure, go ahead.” Hannibal smiled, stepping out into the waiting room. Will was dumbstruck. When he walked in he was going to turn Hannibal in but now it seemed they were going to get Will a new suit and he was going to the opera. Will thought of the other man like a raging river, no use going against the current. Hannibal wanted him to quit too it seemed, if all his work pitting him against Jack was any show of it. Will took out his phone, and called Beverly with shaking hands.

“Hey, Will, what's up?” There was a light giggling in the background, a young girl.

“You have company?”

“Just my sister. She’s staying tonight, going back home tomorrow.”

“I think.. I think I was wrong.”

“Oh? Is this about the case Will? What happened?”

“No, no. I think… Doctor Lecter just smelled me, and then told me we’re getting a suit fitted for me tonight, and I’m going to wear it to an opera on Sunday.” Will was still a bit detached, unsure of how they got from A to B. No way he was moving to some boatyard now. Maybe there were some in Baltimore, perhaps an animal shelter.

“You’re going on a date?”

“I think so?”

“Wait a sec, He *smelled* you?” Beverly sounded surprised, and there was a shocked note in the background. He could picture her mouthing words to her sister, letting her know everything that was happening.

“Yeah, that was kinda-” Will heard the Doctor’s footsteps as he finished his call, “He’s coming back, gotta go, bye!” He hung up quickly, putting his phone away and turning to Hannibal as he entered the room.

“Please, Will.” Hannibal stepped aside, opening the door and offering his arm. Will flushed, but still took the offered appendage.

“I-I, uh,” Will whistled for Phantom as he fought for the right words. “How much is this going to cost?”

“You? Nothing. I will handle all expenses.” Hannibal was absolutely preening, head held high as he lead Will out to his bentley.

Will knew his protests would not be heard, and so swallowed them down. “I don’t know if I’m really worth that, but thank you.”

“It's my pleasure. Excuse me a moment.” Will watched as Hannibal opened the backseat, pulled out a ridiculously expensive looking blanket, and covered the back seat. He then pulled out *baby wipes,* and Will had not hold back laughter as he meticulously cleaned Phantom’s paws and then patted the backseat. The dog didn’t respond.

“Phantom,” He whistled once and pointed. “Up.” The dog jumped immediately into the seat, lounging back into the blanket.

“You’ll have to teach me their commands.”

“It's pretty simple. Their name and a whistle, then the general idea of what you want them to do. They usually get it.” Hannibal opened the door to the passenger side after closing Phantom in, helping Will into the car. “You don’t need to do all of that for me you know.”

“Dear Will, I want to.” Hannibal smiled, and with the sound of the closing door Will knew that there wasn't any way out of this now, he had fallen hard. He smiled back at Hannibal when the man hopped in, and started the engine.

“It’s nice to have someone care. Thank you.” Will needed to see if he could push the same buttons on Hannibal he normally could on other people. If he was stuck with him, he needed to know how to get things he wanted.

“I care very deeply for you Will.” That button still works. They didn’t say much over the rest of the drive, Hannibal thinking very deeply on something that seemed to upset him, and Will not wanting to pry and possibly tip off that he knew far more than he was letting on.

They pulled up to a fancy looking building, Will waiting for Hannibal to get his door as the man seemed to get a kick out of treating Will like some high class maiden. So he took Hannibal’s arm, let himself be lead into the shop. Phantom was left in the car with some water set in the cup holder (Will bit his tongue about how messy that dog drank) and classical music gently playing for him over the stereo.

Rapid fire italian was spoken as soon as the distinguished woman strut out from the back. Will was soon lost, he knew french enough to catch some words but most just went over his head. She seemed to come to a decision however, walking back to a large array of suits and pulling out one that was a deep blue when the light caught it right. She paired it with a black shirt and a tie that was just the right shade to match his eyes. She held the items up to Will in the light, nodding and handing them over to him and pushing him gently towards the dressing room. He waddled back, a bit in a daze, hearing more italian spoken between the woman and Hannibal.

He sighed, changing into the attire before him, and then stepping back out where he was quickly ushered onto a large podium in an adjacent room. Then a measuring tape was stuck in

some places he didn't really want to consider and she wrote down measurements onto a notepad.

"I still feel guilty about letting you buy this for me." Will spoke as soon as the woman ran off to get something else, an estimate probably.

"Seeing you dressed up is worth more than I could ever spend on suits for you." Will flushed again, the Doctor's words confirming that, yes, it's true, Hannibal fancied him.

Will still didn't believe it, it was too good to be true.

Ahh, but it wasn't. He's a killer, there's the catch.

"I'd rather get another dog honestly. Fancy outings and social situations are always hard for me." Will joked, then realized he my get another dog from Hannibal by saying such things. "I've got my hands full with Rover right now, he doesn't know that cats don't like to roughhouse." Will laughed to himself.

"The retriever from one of the unfortunate families on your last case?"

"Yeah, he's a real goofball." The woman came back in, handing Hannibal a paper that Will guessed was an estimate.

"Will, you may change back into your normal clothes, I'll drop the suit off for you tomorrow evening."

"You don't have to drive all the way out to Wolf Trap for that, I can come get it Sunday before we go. You don't mind if I just change at your house?"

"Of course not, but I would like to meet your new friend as well."

"Alright, but Bev and the boys come over Saturday night's as well. You're welcome to join us, but we may be a bit too…" Will searched for the right word as he stepped back into the dressing room. "Rowdy and crude."

"I'm sure I'd be fine for a few hours. Unless, you don't want me at your house?"

Will cursed in his head as he stepped back out of the dressing room, leaving the suit on the rack that was instructed. "Of course I do! I'm just not sure you would enjoy yourself."

"Will, you told me not moments ago that you don't enjoy social outing like the opera, and yet you have not told me you would not wish to go."

"I'm going because you want me there." Will spoke honestly, and he was a bit shocked at the sincerity of the statement. Hannibal seemed to be as well, before Will was overwhelmed with a rush of pure joy. Hannibal offered his arm again and led Will out to the car, settling him in. Phantom had not taken the offered water, instead snoring in the backseat and drooling on the blanket.

“Well, then I shall socialize with your friends as well, at least for a few hours.” Hannibal wrinkled his nose back at the dog, who shifted and kicked his leg in the air. Will snorted.

“You already tolerate my dog.”

“Phantom is essential to your happiness, dear Will. What kind of man would I be to not lavish him with the same affection you deserve?” Will felt his face grow warm again. He smiled. They would be okay.

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Will stared at the new bottle of aftershave in his cabinet, the old one long thrown out. He heard a car pull up, as well as the happy laughs and sounds of his gaggle of friends. He opened the door after he heard the engine shut off, his dogs rushing out and barking their greetings.

“Will! Hey!” Beverly rushed out of the car and enveloped him in a hug. “You sly dog you, you had us all fooled!” She tousled his hair, walking past him in her fuzzy pj’s. He had hoped Hannibal would have gotten there before his friends- he could at least explain what was about to unfold.

“You had Brian and Bev fooled, not me.” Jimmy corrected as he walked past, pulling questionable things out of a backpack.

“Pound it dude.” Will gave Brian a fistbump, before turning and following his friends inside.

“Put the drugs away, he’s actually coming by to drop my suit off tonight.” Will took the bags and things and put them in the upstairs.

“You should have told me Will! I would have brought spare pajamas!” Will’s brain struggled to come up with the image of Hannibal in fuzzy pajamas, and found himself ultimately failing.

“He’s not staying.”

“ *Tonight.”* Brian winked, and Will hurled the nearest object at him, which happened to be one of Gremlin’s sweaters. “Hey! You know cat hair is bad for your eyes!” Zeller began to rub at his face, and Will started laughing.

“He’s a sphinx!” A Zeller started to sneeze, he picked up the sweater. It was covered in little black hairs. “That's odd.”

“What?” Bev looked over his shoulder.

“Black hairs.” He brought the sweater into his study, looking at them under a magnifying glass usually used for lures.

“Isn’t Salem a black cat?” Jimmy asked, looking at the hairs.

“Uhm, not technically. Her hairs are a really dark shade of ginger or brown, that's why she shines like that. They're not pitch black like this. And these are too short to be any of the dogs.”

“New cat in the neighborhood?” Brian asked, blowing his nose.

Will smiled. New cats would appear from time to time, people liked to dump them here. They would socialize and get to know his hoard, and then figure out that they were all eating a sleeping in the same place and decide to move in. Will would get them up to date on vaccines and other medical needs, and he would just have another cat. "Hope they like dogs."

"You're gonna take them in?" Beverly's eyebrows shot up.

"What else would I do?"

"Will, you could run an animal rescue. Have the ones you keep, and rehabilitate others. It'd be good for you! And then you wouldn't run out of room." Jimmy suggested, petting Wolf. The Maine Coon yawned, flopping back into the cushions with a loud thump.

"That would be nice. If you see the cat, let me know. I wanna get a good look at him so I know what size collar to buy." Will got out a deck of cards.

Brian sat down at the table, followed by Jimmy. Beverly was looking out the window, with a concerned face. "What is it? We were gonna play go fish." Will asked, walking over to her.

"I think I spotted him, where's your first aid kit?" She asked, pointing to a point by the treeline. Will looked out, taking out his phone and using the camera to zoom in. That was a new cat, but it was beat to high hell. Pastel sat by him, bringing him food.

"First bathroom, under the sink!" Will shouted as he grabbed his raincoat, the jacket fur lined with a special pocket he had installed just for this. Inside there were cat treats and a bag of kibble, and it was big enough for Wolf. He had made the pocket when he realized his cats liked to go in his jackets-even when he just discovered them minutes ago.

He dashed out the front door, slowing down as the cat looked in his direction.

"Hey there buddy..." Will knelt, Pastel meowing at him and sitting by his legs. He gave her a treat, and the other cat perked up. It was beat very bad.

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It was missing an eye, and cuts and bruised covered it. There were scars, and its front leg looked broken. A large burn was on its back, blistered and infected. "Oh god, who would do this..." There was a cigarette burn by its left ear, which had been half torn off. He opened the bag of kibble, and placed it halfway between him and the cat. He registered the sound of a car pulling up in the back of his mind, but he was kneeling in the snow in fuzzy pajamas and a raincoat already and the cat was more important. It ate slowly, Will noticing a missing tooth.

He got up keeping an eye on the cat, and walking back towards the Bentley.

"Will, what happened-"

"Hey, could you please run into the house and have Beverly get some soft food for me? I don't know if the cat should be eating solids."

"Of course." Hannibal nodded, walking back towards his house and Will went back to the cat. He gently showed his hands, and took the soft food.

"We're gonna get you better food. It won't hurt to eat." The cat meowed, scratchy and painful sounding. Will winced, and Hannibal came back with a bowl of wet food. He got up to take it, placing it gently in front of the cat. "He needs to go to the hospital, badly. He's shivering and missing alot of fur, he's probably dehydrated."

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"Should I get a carrier?" Hannibal asked, looking at the scrappy little thing.

"Watch him for me, I'll be right back with the stuff we need. Thanks!" Will rushed past Hannibal, and got inside. "We gotta take him to the vet, he's in really bad shape." Will said, grabbing a baby bottle from his cabinet and filling it with warm water.

"We'll come with you. We can drive you and help with the cat." Beverly said, already grabbing her bag. Jimmy and Brian grabbed theirs too.

"Hannibal is watching the cat right now, I'll go out and get him." Will left the carrier and the water with Beverly, running out back to the cat. It was licking out the last of the food, and Will knelt in the snow again. "Come on bud, let's fix you up." Will held out a hand, and the cat limped forward. It mewed, and hobbled into his lap and tried to get in his jacket. He slowly scooped it up, mindful of his injuries, and walked back to where the carrier was waiting.

He placed the cat in, surrounded by blankets, and began to give him warm water from the bottle. "My car has a GPS, I can get us to the nearest animal hospital." Hannibal stated, opening up the passenger door for Will.
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The team piled in the back, and Hannibal started the car. He put the heater on, and set the directions, starting the way to the hospital.

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Will slept in the waiting room, having fallen asleep on Hannibal's shoulder waiting for the cat. The rest of the team were in similar states, as the time was around 12:00. Hannibal smiled down at Will, happy that he trusted his presence enough to have a quiet sleep. It was truly a privilege to see Will so focused like that, intent on one goal. Hannibal was right to befriend his pack- they were Will's everything for a long time.

Will shifted in his sleep, snuggling closer. The cat was going to be fine, Will would have to spend a while taking care of it- he may even take a leave from the FBI to do so. He wouldn't need the money if Hannibal payed the vet bills, something he was already planning on doing.

Hannibal's good night was ruined by the sound of all four of the team's phones going off, waking them up. Brian was the first to check, cursing under his breath. "Who the fuck comes in for an interview at 12:00 am? Give me a fucking break."

Will huffed, and Beverly came over and touched his shoulder. "Jack needs us, we should call a taxi and change. We'll leave Jimmy here?" Jimmy sighed.

"I really should go as well."

"I'll stay. You can bring him home with you tomorrow night, Will."

"I can't make you do that."

"This is important, I can miss a night of sleep the ensure his safety and well being." It was all worth it when Will smiled at him like that. His heart stopped, Will was a perfect picture of beauty, sleepy eyes and a warm smile.

The next day, when the cat managed to rip his guest room sheets to shreds and arrange them into some sort of nest, Hannibal only found amusement.

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Will followed Beverly and the others back to work, changing into normal clothes at Will's and grabbing Winston. The four of them entered Jack’s office together, Will twitching a bit and dreading Jack’s next words.

“Zeller found a match on our Angel Maker earlier today, as I am sure you are all aware. His wife is-”

“Wait, I’m sorry, no I wasn’t.” Will furrowed his brows, confused.

“We were going to tell him tomorrow morning, give him a break from the case.” Beverly shielded him.

“He’s barely been on this case, he doesn’t need any breaks Katz.”

“All due respect sir, but he puts his mind at risk more than the rest of us do. This is dangerous and bad for him mentally and he doesn’t need to be helping us on these cases. It's not his job.” Beverly stuck her neck out, the other three men in the room looking at her with shock as Jack rose from his seat.

“You’re right. This isn’t his job. He doesn’t need to be on this. But he is, and he needs to be as updated as everyone else is on this case. Now, Elliot Budish, our Angel Maker, has a wife and two kids.”

“They haven’t seen him in four months, he was diagnosed five months ago.” Zeller filled in.

“We need to talk to his wife, she’s waiting outside for us. Her name is Emma. You ready?” Will nodded, feeling fritzy. There was so much stress and anger in the room and he couldn’t handle it well. Winston whined on his foot, and Beverly took his shoulder and squeezed it reassuringly. He latched onto her, mirroring her calm and collected aura.

Jack stepped outside, motioning for the woman to come in. Worry, stress, fear, jumbled and heavy filled the room. A worried wife. Will sighed, and took the seat across from her. Jack introduced them, and Will only paid enough attention to listen for key facts or words.

Will felt a heavy dread come from Jack as the woman was talking, a horrible realization. The hurt and the overwhelming emotions in the room were almost too much for him. He watched as Jack took a seat behind his desk, breathless. Will gathered himself and spoke around the knot in his throat.

“Was he ever violent, Misses Budish?”

“He was angry. But he never hit me or the boys. It was hardest on them…” Will couldn’t focus on her words, the horrible torrent of hurt and sorrow plaguing the room too much for Will to handle. He glanced up at Beverly, who was taking notes on a notepad, and sighed in relief. He could just ask the questions and get the responses from her later. He looked back at her, faintly aware that his hands were shaking.

“And, uhm, did your husbands faith falter after he was told about the cancer?”

“Elliot wasn’t ever religious.” Will blinked in shock. “Is he doing something religious?”

“He may believe he is.” Will answered. Not ever religious? That was strange.

“Your husband is dying, Misses Budish, and soon.” Jack’s voice was raspy, it hurt Will to hear. He was on the verge of tears. That was odd- Jack kept emotional stresses and matters at home and work matters at work. He never mixed them. He just realized something very wrong. “We’d just like to… we’d like to find him before he hurts himself or anyone else.”

“He… he had a near death experience. He suffocated in a fire when he was a little boy.” *If he got close to it, that’s where he will look for it again.* Gotcha. “Fireman said he must’ve had a guardian angel.”

“Where did this happen?”

“Uhm, a farm. Where he grew up.”

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Will, Jack, and Winston spent the night traveling to the old barn, with a rusted roof and burnt walls. They reached there around first light, Will remaining silent for the trip as to not aggravate Jack. He started crying at one point- silent tears rolling down his cheeks in the dark. Will chose not to ask. Jack was having enough trouble, and Will calling attention to it even when they were alone wouldn’t help.

Will pet Winston and told him to stay, hopping out of the car and walking towards the barn. Jack was not too far behind him, and with each step Will could smell death in the air. He knew what they would find there. And hanging from the rafters, there he was. Elliot Budish. Will fought back a smile, the case had ended. He was free.

“This will be the last one.”

“It's Budish?”

“He made himself into an angel. Wasn’t God, wasn’t man, it was his choice to die.”

“His choice?”

“As much as he can make it.” Will knew one day he’d look at a body that he himself put there. That would be on his own terms- looking at other killers just made him lose himself in them. “I don’t think I can be all that useful to you anymore, Jack.”

“Really? You caught three. The last three we had, you caught. You caught three of them.”

“No, I didn’t catch this one. Elliot Budish… surrendered. I think I have to surrender too Jack.”

“You know, I’m used to my wife not talking to me.” *His wife. She has cancer.* Will felt a tug of guilt. “I don’t have to get used to you not talking to me too.”

“It’s getting harder and harder to make myself look.”

“Nobody’s asking you to look alone.”

“But I am looking alone. Nobody can look with me, can see the way I see. Katz and the others try to stand with me to catch me but they can’t stop the fall Jack. I’m going to fall. You know what looking at this does.”

“I know what happens if you don't look. And you are right- nobody can see the way you see Will.”

“But it's shutting down, I can’t do it anymore Jack.”

“What is it about this one?”

“It isn’t about this one- it's about all of them. And the one that I know is coming after this one, and the one after that-”

“You wanna go back to your lecture hall? Read about this stuff on Tattlecrime.com?”

“No, I don’t. I want to find some boatyard or pet shelter and stop thinking about this whole thing. It's what I have to do this is *bad* for me.”

“I’m not your father, Will. I’m not gonna tell you what you should do.”

“Seems like that’s exactly what you’re gonna do.” Will’s resolve was breaking- It was so hard for him to stick up for himself in any capacity. He’d put himself in the others shoes and see his health as an inconvenience at best and give in. Jack didn’t need him quitting, not with what was going on with his wife.

“You leave, when there is killing going on that you could’ve prevented, it will sour you forever.” Will looked away. “You wanna quit? Quit.” Jack turned and walked away, but the emotion behind the words dug in deep. Will knew he should- should walk away from this, it was bad for him, he was sleepwalking and-

Elliot Budish was walking up behind him. Will drew his gun pointing it at the skinned man with a knife in his hand.

“I see what you are.” He spoke, raspy and forced with pain.

“What do you see?”

“Inside. I can bring it out of you.”

Will shivered. His dark streak ran too deep. “Not all the way out.”

“I can give you the majesty of your becoming.” He coughed, and then he was back in the rafters. Will felt sick.

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He couldn’t quit. Will decided that. Jack needed him- needed his help. And Jack… Jack was his friend, like the others. They were a team. Will walked down the hall to Jack's office, taking a deep breath.

“What do you want, Will?”

He stepped in, walking over and taking a seat next to Jack. He knew how much it hurt to lose Clyde to cancer- and now he was feeling what it felt to lose a spouse from Jack. It hurt, tugged at his heart harder than anything else.

“I’m gonna sit here until you’re ready to talk. You don’t have to say a word until you’re ready, but I’m not going anywhere until you do.”

He was in this for the long haul.

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Will got home and threw his keys down, looking at the clock before he started cursing profoundly. Hannibal was picking him up at 6 because the opera was at 10 but they needed an extra hour to have dinner beforehand. He only had forty minutes at the *most*-

“Boo!” Will screamed,drawing his gun and pointing it at a smiling Beverly Katz.

“Fucking *hell* Bev what the fuck!” He put the gun down, taking off his jacket.

“I know you're on a time constraint, so I’m here to help!” She took out a lint roller from a bag she was holding, shoving him bodily into the bathroom with a towel. “Shower quickly, I’ll help with shaving!”

“Wait- Bev-” The door was shut, and he sighed, shucking off his clothes and getting into the shower.

He stepped out and dried, noticing that fresh underwear had been supplied with the towel, and putting them on. She knocked, and he opened the door. “Bev, really, I’m thankful but you don’t need to-”

“I *want* to, this kinda stuff is lots of fun!” She took out a fresh razor and shaving cream, sitting him down on the toilet before getting to work.

“I know how to *shave-”*

“But I can shave both my legs in three minutes without cutting myself and you don’t look like you’ve touched a razor in *months*. Now hold still!” She was right, he really was bad at it, which is why he often went without it. He held still for her, and she did get him clean shaven a lot quicker than he ever had.

“You finish up in here and I’ll prep the suit!” She stepped back out, dogs crowding around her ankles as she walked. He looked at himself in the mirror, at least ten years younger than he had looked before. He looked... good? He finished up and stepped out, and Beverly grabbed him and started helping him out things on.

He was dressed and ready with ten minutes to spare, and he smiled at her. “Nice job.”

“Very nice.” She smiled, looking him over, before grimacing at his hair. “Do you *own* a brush?” She scolded, taking out one of her own.

Will laughed as she ran him over again with the lint roller, his pets trying their hardest to undo her efforts. “I miss doing this with my own sister, thanks for being a stand in.”

“No, it's fun. I think I get the appeal now. Plus I wouldn’t look as good without you here. That roller is a god.”

She laughed loudly, and dragged him outside, shutting the animals in. “That should help. You really should meet Maria sometime- could a bring her over to one of the hangouts?”

“You mean the slumber parties?”

“Shush, we call them hangouts around the lab so other people don’t think we’re weird.”

“Mission failed, they’re at my house.”

“Good point.” The sound of a car pulling up made both of them turn and look at the driveway, and Will smiled.

“That's my cue.”

“I’m staying here tonight and partying with the pets. I love Whiskey and Max.”

“And they love you. You have free reign of everything but the pot.” She laughed, and patted his back before going back into the house.

“If by the time you make it back home I’m still here I expect full details!”

Will tried to calm his racing heart as he walked towards the Bentley, Hannibal of course stepping out to meet him. He took one look at Will before freezing, not expecting Will to have shaved, and Will felt his heart skip a beat when they made eye contact.

“You look magnificent.”

“I feel weird, my face hasn’t been bare for years.” Will rubbed his cheek, the skin feeling strange exposed.

Hannibal took a step toward him, bending at the waist and kissing his hand. He gestured to the car. “Shall we?” Will smiled, sure his cheeks were bright red.

“You’re a dork, you know that right?” Will let Hannibal open the door for him, sitting down in the fancy car.

Hannibal sat down in the driver's seat, scoffing at him. “I am simply treating you with the praise and attention you deserve.”

“You’re going to spoil me. After a year of this kind of treatment I’ll end up a whiny brat.”

The air in the car got a little bit brighter, Hannibal preening with happiness. “I’ll try to keep up with your demands.” Will smiled. He knew exactly what he was doing. The happier he made Hannibal the more dangerous he was. Maybe he would be able to get some control over Hannibal, use him even more to his advantage. Will reached for his hand while they were driving, and realized most of the joy he was feeling was his own.

Maybe he should find an actual therapist.

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Hannibal had not been this happy in years. Will seemed in a much better mood now that this case was done, and he knew that after Will had gotten a look at some of his own kills, Hannibal would convince him to retire. Maybe even move in with him. The conversation in the car was very pleasant, despite the unpleasantness of some topics. He learned more about how Will saw the world- and his *great* distaste for any type of animal abuser.

They held hands for nearly the entire car ride, and Hannibal was so delighted at the prolonged contact. He had given up on any sort of lifelong partner in this regard, but Will made a joke about a year from now- showing he expected a long term relationship, even if subconsciously. This would make it even easier to make Will completely dependent on him, their family could come together like he wanted.

Even if it was with considerably more pets than he expected. He was absolutely enchanted with the way Will had with animals, unguarded and in his element. It was breathtaking, and worth the hair. He held open the door for Will to step out when they reached the opera, offering him his arm. Will cared enough about him to change his appearance for Hannibal as well, even going so far as to ask for a friends help.

He knew Will was cultured enough to understand the performance, Hannibal booking a special box seat just to show off a bit. The real task Will was undertaking for him was the socialization. Even if he did nothing more than drink champagne and hold onto Hannibal’s arm, that was more than enough.

Will did end up doing mostly that- making small remarks at Hannibal when they were alone or simply reading people behind his glass. He felt honored that Will had trusted him enough to forgo the dog tonight, trusted him enough to shield him.

“And who is this pretty young thing- I’ve never seen you with a partner before Hannibal.” Miss Komeda glided over to the two of them, Hannibal smiling at his old friend.

“This is Will Graham. Will, this is an old friend of mine, Miss Komeda.”

“How do you do, Mister Graham.” She asked, offering her hand. He shook it gently and gave a sort of smile, avoiding her eyes.

“Good, and yourself?”

“Very good.” She looked him up and down. “What do you do, Mister Graham?” She gave a devious smile to Hannibal, very aware of how young Will looked.

“He is a teacher at the FBI academy.”

“Is he now? How interesting.”

It was always pleasant to talk with her, she had an air of refined darkness about her and came from old money, like himself. She enjoyed taking people off the streets and cleaning them up enough to be reintroduced to society on their own feet, a very kind habit of hers that she never flaunted for attention. He quite enjoyed her company at his dinner’s, and knew he would have to throw another soon for Will.

This was by far one of the happiest nights of his life.

Chapter End Notes

W h o o p s he has ten cats now. I had this completely written and it got deleted, belch. I fixed it though, yay!

Entree

Chapter Summary

Hannibal starts to pry Will away from the FBI.

Chapter Notes

This chapter got away from me, its about 90% meaningless fluff and its over 10,000 words. I needed some positivity guys, things have been rough.

For once Will left his house to join Jack with a smile on his face and a skip in his step. Winston trotted happily alongside him, tail wagging and tongue lolling. He had enjoyed himself far more than he expected with Hannibal the night before, the man a perfect gentleman in all things. He allowed Will to just people watch and only chat when he felt like it. No forced socialization. Just sitting there looking pretty.

The cat, nicknamed Ripper for the mess he made of Hannibal's guest room, was happily settling into his new life with Will. Hannibal had been the one to name it, and he laughed when Will insisted on paying him for the room. Hannibal had joked that Will could do so by making his presence at the opera a regular thing.

Will had relented easily, deciding to stop worrying and to just let Hannibal do what he wants. Jack turned to him suspiciously in the car, before turning back to the road.

"What's got you so happy? And clean shaven? You were really upset last time you went in."

"Oh, I-" Will thought quickly. Letting Jack know about his relationship with Hannibal would be a bad course of action, he'd be forced to get a new 'therapist' to monitor him for Jack. "Doctor Lecter is trying new methods for therapy on me, they're working I think. I feel more… stable." Will lied through his teeth. He felt very *unstable* was the truth- but that was a good excuse to use. He had been seeing a stag, following him. Through his dreams and into reality. Jack smiled at him.

"Good, that's good."

"I'm considering increasing the frequency of our sessions."

"He's there to keep you grounded Will, take advantage of that as much as you need." Jack nodded, seemingly in a much better mood. The 'good news', even if it was a blatant lie,

would most likely make Jack easier on him. Or harder, if Hannibal decided he didn't like Will looking at other killers more than he wanted a finger in the FBI.

“You said I was going to take a look at the Chesapeake Ripper?” Will prompted.

“Doctor Frederick Chilton claims he has him in custody at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

“Great, another psychiatrist.” Will huffed, tightening his grip on Winston’s leash.

“You like Doctor Lecter and Doctor Bloom.”

“They’re anomalies- and Doctor Bloom feels… patronizing.” Will stepped out of the car as they pulled up, Winston hopping out after him.

“Thanks to Freddie Lounds, that story is floating out there unconfirmed.”

“Unconfirmed, so I’m confirming? Fact-checking for Freddie Lounds…” Will looked up at the building, a sense of foreboding building up in his chest.

“You’re fact checking for me.”

“I’m always nervous going into these places…” Will followed Jack up the stairs, a chill going up his spine.

“Why’s that?”

“I’m afraid they won’t let me out.”

“I won’t leave you here.” Will had a feeling he would break that promise.

“Maybe not today.”

—

Will didn’t like Chilton. Looking at the man made his skin crawl.

“Doctor Bloom just called me about you, Mister Graham, or should I call you Doctor Graham.” Will wrinkled his nose in disgust, Winston giving a growling bark. He tugged gently on the leash.

“I’m not a doctor.”

“You’re not FBI either, that's a temporary identification.” Chilton pointed out, rather rudley.

“Mister Graham teaches at the academy.” Jack intervened, and Will further solidified the fact that he did not want anyone who wasn’t Hannibal poking around his head.

“Ah, a teacher. Please, gentlemen, take a seat.” Chilton motioned to the rather large chairs, and Will snapped his fingers quietly at Winston as he sat, acting as if the dog leaping into his lap and rolling over was unprecedented and out of character.

“Winston…” Will gently chided, watching with great delight as Chilton’s eye twitched. He rubbed Winston's stomach, the dog wagging his tail and panting happily at him.

He opened his mouth to tell Will to get the dog *out of the chair* when Jack interrupted.

“Doctor Chilton, we’re going to need to see the crime scene while it’s still relatively undisturbed.”

“I assure you for something so disturbing it is quite undisturbed. Now-”

“Why was a nurse left alone with a prisoner in a high-security psychiatric hospital?” Will asked, smiling just a tad. Winston tilted his head with a whine, further patronizing Chilton. This was rather amusing to Will, and Jack was letting him have his fun before he looked at the scene that was undoubtedly a horror show. Letting Will blow off his stress like this would keep his mind clear and in working order for the scenes, Jack probably thought. It was bullshit, no amount of stress relief would keep him clear-headed and sane looking at what he did, but this was fun.

“For the two years since he was brought here, Gideon behaved perfectly and gave every appearance of cooperating with attempts at therapy. As dictated by our present administrator, security around him was slightly… relaxed.” Chilton leaned forward, Will unconsciously leaning back. He didn’t like this man. “I cannot help feeling responsible myself for what happened. He sat directly across from me and I had no idea what he was hiding. And now one of our staff is dead.” His eyes flicked back down to Winston. “Could you-”

“I understand, Doctor.” Jack interrupted. “Will is going to need to see the crime scene with as much privacy as you can provide,”

“Oh yes, that thing you do. You are quite the topic of discussion in psychiatric circles, Mister Graham.”

“Am I?” Will was quiet, weighing things.

“Uh, yes. A unique cocktail of personality disorders and neuroses that make you a highly skilled profiler.” Chilton should tread carefully- Will was quite sure Hannibal wanted all his unique abilities and analyzing them to himself. Will coming up as a speculative topic in the wrong atmosphere would lead to disaster.

“He’s not here to be analyzed.”

“Perhaps he should be. We are woefully short of material on your sort of thing, Mister Graham. Would you mind speaking to some of the staff?” Will saw Chilton, dead, when he looked up. *Curiosity killed the cat.* His eyes and tongue were gone, chest carved out and empty with studies and papers signed in Chilton's own name falling out of his gut.

He blinked and the image was gone, a chill running up his spine. “Doctor-”

“No, no no, not this trip. Maybe a special visit.” Chilton stood over Will, and Will contemplated what he just saw.

“Thank you, Doctor Chilton.” Will moved to get up, Winston hopping off his lap and yipping happily. “I’d like to see the crime scene now.”

___

Will reminisced on the Ripper as he followed Jack and Chilton down the halls of the BSHCI. He remembered stepping into his mindset through photos and looking at old case files, teaching about them in class. He was dreading getting a fresh Ripper kill.

Will watched Chilton talk with an air of drama, acting as if he was a ringmaster about to show off some horror. Will smiled to himself at the thought of him in a bright red clown suit.

“Doctor Chilton consulted on the case when we failed to catch the Ripper after his last series of murders.” Bitter, that’s a blow to his ego. One of the guards took Winston’s leash as Will walked into the room, the body artfully displayed. This was odd. He never repeated himself- each piece was unique. Will could see why Jack was skeptical. He was skeptical.

Chilton was talking, but Will wasn’t listening. There was a twinge of anger, on the edge of his consciousness. Not his.

“I need the room.”

___

Will pulled the fork tine out of the palm of his hand, picking the lock and removing himself from the table quickly and quietly. By the time the nurse heard the flat line he was on her, hitting her in the throat made her fall down.

Will got on top of her, gouging her eyes out with his fingers and making her bleed. She was only alive for the first stab, the tools and equipment sliding into her body with little difficulty.

This was practiced, affirming. Who was he again? He didn’t remember. He’s a Doctor, but this is new for him. Who was he? Who?

____

Will snapped out of his daze, looking down at the nurse. This wasn't the same mentality- the nurse didn't do anything to deserve this treatment. Will felt as though the real Ripper was watching over his shoulder, disgusted at the plagiarism and mistreatment. He could see his shadow by his side, great black antlers-

"Will."

"Uhm." Will slid his glasses back on, turning away from the shadow. "As far as we know, it's been over two years since the Chesapeake Ripper killed?"

"That's correct."

"And how long ago was Gideon admitted?"

"Almost two years ago." Jack answered. Will felt his hands shake. Gideon wasn't the Ripper, but the real one would be very, very angry. This was very rude, horribly discourteous- the RIpper valued courtesy above all else. Will walked out, leaving Jack feeling melancholy and taking Winston.

"Alana Bloom is in my office, would you care to meet with us and discuss what you saw in there?" Chilton prompted, and Will sighed, following him to go see another psychiatrist.

___

Alana smiled when Will stepped in, very warm and friendly. It felt off- her warmth unguarded now that Hannibal was 'working' on him. It meant he was safe for her he supposed. He hated it.

Her smiled faltered when she looked down. "That's not Phantom. I was expecting his usual 'hello'."

"Jack said Phanny was too dangerous to have around. Hannibal has been helping me with Winston's classes." She smiled softly at him. He wanted to scream.

"You shaved. I don't think I've ever seen your bare face." She mused, glancing up at him through her lashes. "It looks good."

"Thank you."

Chilton and Alana began discussing Gideon, and Will thought about how to break the bad news.

"He butchered his last wife and her family on thanksgiving."

"There's no accounting for taste. Or intelligence."

“Murdering his wife was impulsive. The Chesapeake Ripper is methodical, meticulous. That’s why he’s so hard to catch.” Will painted it out for them. What was he missing?

“Was, so hard to catch.” Chilton corrected. Will gave an exaggerated roll of the eyes, turning back to the window. He had his shields up full blast, not wanting a whiff from Chilton. Pride rolled off him in toxic waves, making him arrogant and prissy. It was cute when Hannibal did it, coming from Chilton it felt… obnoxious. “Will you be conducting a joint interview?”

“Separate. Compare and contrast.” Alana explained. Will realized he called Hannibal cute in his head, and realized the word did fit him quite well. At least to Will. He frowned when he realized he was smiling softly, thinking about a man who was probably a horrible monster, shaking his head and turning back into the conversation.

“I know you’re anxious to get on with it. You have talked to Gideon before, for some length of time.”

“Well, I saw him mainly in court. I wrote an article about him in the Journal of Criminal Psychology.” Alana explained. Chilton got up from his desk.

“He is *very* familiar with you. He has given you alot of thought.” Will wrinkled his nose at the implications behind Chilton’s words, and huffed. If the Ripper ‘loved’ someone, he would cherish them like a prize. He wouldn’t butcher them and their family at thanksgiving- he would smother them in expensive gifts and heartfelt gestures and ensure that they would never want to run away. And if they did want to run, or he no longer wanted them, he would disappear them privately and respectfully.

“You had some sessions with him?” Will asked, distantly. His mind was screaming something at him, something important. What was it? His head started to hurt.

“Yes, two, a couple years ago when he was first institutionalized.”

“I read your notes of course, they were more or less helpful as I conducted my own interviews with Doctor Gideon over the years.”

“I’m glad I was helpful.”

“More or less.” Chilton gave a forced smile as Will said those words, seeing through the veil of civility he put on. What a prick. He thought himself higher than everyone else, put himself on a pedestal.

Will wanted to knock it out from under him and beat him with it.

“I’ll go first.” Alana left the room.

“Now, Will, that we’re alone-”

Will held up a hand to stop him, pulling out his phone and starting to text Beverly.

He wasn’t going to say one word to Chilton.

___

Will (3:09 pm): Hey, I told Jack that we're trying a new kind of therapy and so I'm going to see you more often. I don't want him sending me to someone else because we get more involved than he wants, so I kept it a secret.

Hannibal (4:00 pm): I agree. I should like to keep you all to myself. -HL

Will stared at the late response, probably given just after an appointment. Alana was due to be done, and Chilton had attempted multiple times at talking to Will. Will had busied himself texting Bev, then creating a group chat with her and the boys, then reading whatever bullshit he grabbed first from the bookshelf.

Alana came back, and motioned him to the door. He grabbed some of Chilton's annoyance to hide how internally happy he was for some god forsaken reason that a *killer* had an obsession with him.

Time to talk to the 'Ripper'.

___

Gideon was crude, rude, and most certainly not the ripper. That's what Will knew has he left the BSHCI.

Will's pocket chimed with a text, and he sliped Winston's leash up his arm to pull out his phone.

Hannibal (5:15): I hope you're still in Baltimore. Would you like to have dinner? -HL.

Will (5:15): Sure, I don't have a car though. Office or house?

Hannibal (5:16): Office, We can drive back and prepare dinner together. -HL

Will smiled, texting back a quick affirmative before calling a taxi. He really needed to stop letting Jack drive him places.

—

The taxi took a bit to get to Hannibal's office. Will hopped out, and looked up to see Jack and Hannibal exiting the building together.

"Will, if I had known you were coming here I would have stayed and given you a ride."

"I-I, uhm, If i had known you were I would have asked." Winston yipped happily tugging on Will's arm and greeting Hannibal by sitting in front of him and pawing at the air in front of him. Will laughed. "You've been trying to train him haven't you?"

"I thought I could teach them better greeting manners them barking or licking." Hannibal said, dumbfounded as the dog started to howl and put up his other paw.

"If you do it too much they start acting without the command and expecting the treat. I've lost entire pizza's that way." Will laughed as Winston grew more upset, whining loudly and laying on the ground, hiding his snout. "I know boy, how rude of him not to give you your treat." At this Hannibal looked positively *affronted,* brows furrowed and mouth open in shock.

Jack shook his head, chuckling. Will tuned into him, he was like a raw wire, all the nerves exposed. They had a *talk.*

"Thank you again Doctor Lecter, for helping so much with Will's dogs. Winston is very sweet."

"Winston is lovely, but not as well suited to the job as Phantom was. We make due, however." Hannibal gave a tight lipped smile, but he looked completely innocent. Will felt the words land though, guilting Jack expertly. They talked about something to do with taking care of people under his command, or at least it brought of memories. Miriam Lass, the last known Ripper victim. Jack didn't take proper care of her- Hannibal struck a live nerve right on the head.

Will smiled, taking Hannibal's side. "Shall we?" Will asked, tugging Winston up. The dog gave an exaggerated whine, before pulling himself to his feet and following.

Jack stepped away, back to his car. "I'll leave him in your capable hands, Doctor." He turned, getting in and driving away.

Will slipped his arm into Hannibal's, laughing lightly. Hannibal raised an eyebrow, walking with him to the bentley. "I called our relationship therapy and Jack bought it. He has no idea."

"It serves his purpose, you are less stressed while we are together and I'm still your paddle."

Will sighed, "He'd throw a shit fit if he knew that everyone on the team but him was aware of it."

“You told your friends?” Hannibal smiled a bit, and Will could feel he was genuinely elated. Will rolled his eyes- he knew he was a private person, but he worked with FBI for god's sake. He couldn’t hide this if he wanted too.

“I told Beverly, she told Brian and Jimmy.” Will smiled. “Those two need to get a clue.” Hannibal opened the backdoor, getting out the blanket again for Winston. “So, what dish am I going to ruin until you sit me down in the corner.”

Hannibal tutted, opening his door after Winston was secured in the back. “So little faith in yourself Will. And we are going to have a bourbon-glazed pork belly with a light kale salad, something simple. The belly is already cooked, so it will be simple to finish preparation.”

Will smiled at him. “That sounds fantastic.”

___

Will helped Hannibal arrange their meals on the plate, taking it out to the dining room while Hannibal prepared the wine. Things were nice, and Will even caught Hannibal feeding a big bowl of scraps to Winston when Will went to wash up. They filled the silence with talking about everything and nothing, passing jokes and banter and kept a light feeling in the air.

Will sat facing away from the beastiality swan porn (*seriously who has that in their dining room)* and waited as Hannibal poured the wine, naming it as a white from some fancy foreign vineyard.

“So, Abel Gideon is the Chesapeake Ripper Jack has hunted after for the past several years.” Hannibal prodded, asking something as a statement.

Will snorted. “Don’t be ridiculous. Gideon is nothing like the Ripper. I don’t even think the Ripper is a typical psychopath- he wouldn’t have got himself caught for some impulsive little kill like Gideon did.” Will ate some of the chunks on his plate, moaning around the mouthfuls. “This is really good. As always.” Will complemented, taking a sip of his wine.

Hannibal preened, and Will resisted the urge to roll his eyes as his pride. He was a good cook, Will said it every time. For some reason tonight he was even more ecstatic. Maybe it was because they were together now? No, that wasn’t it. This was odd. Because Will helped?

“Jack worries the Ripper will take more agents from him.” Hannibal said, eyes flicking up to meet Will’s. Will saw the question there, clear as day. '*Will you be alright?'*

“I’m not a trainee. I won’t go looking without any backup.” Will reassured him, maintaining eye contact. There was something dark in there, Will sought too see it better, bring it into the light and see who he really was. He broke the gaze. “The Ripper is still out there. He’s going to think it very rude Gideon is taking credit for his art, and very rude of Jack for believing him. He’s going to make it very clear that they’re wrong.”

“His art?” Will snapped out of his thoughts.

“That’s what he does. He elevates pigs into art. That's how he sees it.” Will explained, looking back down at his food. Suddenly he wasn’t as hungry. Will forced himself to eat anyway.

“I worry about you Will. I’m worried Jack won’t see the danger again and not pull you out in time. I know you can take care of yourself, but you shouldn’t have to be your own backup.” Hannibal persuaded him. He was pulling him, gently picking away at the seams holding Will to the FBI until he could tear him away completely.

“I want to quit.” Will said, feeling a scream building in his throat. He wanted *out.* Everytime he thought about it he felt like he was dying slowly, only now aware of the acid eating him away. “But I can’t. I can’t do that to Jack right now- not with what's happening with his wife-”

“His wife and Jack’s personal life are not more important than your sanity Will. Yes, it will cause him more stress to not have you there doing his job for him, but it will not break him like continuing will break you.”

“I can’t, Hannibal. I tried. But I can’t. It’s the fucking empathy- in those moments, i step into the other person's shoes, and my wants become nothing more than a nuisance, a fly to be swatted or just a dog to let out to pee.”

“These aren’t your wants, Will. These are your needs. If your needs are nothing more than a nuisance to Jack then-”

“I can’t! I just, I can’t, okay?” Will interrupted, keeping his head down. Hannibal was using his own worry and concern for Will and his anger at Jack, letting them fill the air around the two so Will would take some of it in. Will was getting overwhelmed by it all- probably purposefully. Hannibal was going to find some way to pull him out of the FBI, Will knew he had to figure out just what monster he was hiding before that.

“I’m sorry. I want you to be safe and happy.” Hannibal reached across the table, Will taking his hand halfway.

“I know, I’m sorry for snapping.” The stag huffed in the doorway, hooves scraping on the ground.

“Finish your dinner, I have a surprise for you.” Hannibal didn’t let go of his hand, continuing to eat.

Will took a deep breath and smiled, picking his fork back up and eating the misnamed meat on his plate.

___

They went back to Hannibal's study with their wine, Winston sound asleep in front of the fire. They talked some more, Will sitting on the couch with his head on Hannibal's shoulder, staring at the fire. It was domestic, nice.

Will stared at their laced fingers, the fire flickering. "I'll keep working. But if you can tell me a solid reason why I should drop a case I will. If my mental state gets too bad I'll drop the teaching and start work someplace else, and just come in when Jack needs me."

Hannibal squeezed his hand, bringing his fingers to his lips and laying a kiss there. "How solid does the reason have to be?"

"Flashbacks, causing bad nightmares or sleepwalking-"

"What if I just want to spend time with you or take you on a vacation somewhere?" Hannibal asked, looking down at him.

"Well, then I'd never get to work at all. If I think they can handle it then you can pull me out for silly things like that." Will compromised, slowly smiling at him. He felt warm and happy, slightly buzzed from the wine but still coherent. Winston rolled over a bit in his sleep.

Hannibal brushed some of the hair out of Will's eyes, bringing his hand down smoothly to cup his jaw. Will leaned in at the same time he did, lips meeting in a tentative kiss. And another, and another. Hannibal shifted to he was on top of him, trapping him against the couch and kissing him softly and sweetly.

Winston groaned and rolled over again, and Hannibal pulled away. "I have a gift for you Will."

Will's eyebrows shot up. "Is *that* where this is going?"

Hannibal gave him an unamused look that made Will chuckle as he removed himself from the couch and got a small package from his desk.

"I don't have anything for you, you should have told me." Will protested as he was handed the package.

"Your company is gift enough." Hannibal smiled, taking the seat next to him again.

"Sap." Will opened the brown paper, and then the box inside. His eyebrows shot up in surprise, taking out the finley made garments.

"You got me fancy cat sweaters?" Will laughed in disbelief.

"Gremlin was shivering the last time I saw him. I had to rectify it."

"Oh *definitely."* Will looked back at the box, furrowing his brows. "How many are in here."

Hannibal puffed out his chest, smiling. "Twelve in total. They all range in an assortment of colors and fabrics, like cashmere and italian wool. Some are thinner, for summer months, and others are more insulated to keep him warm in winter."

Will started laughing again, closing the box back up and setting it beside him. “Thank you, I’m sure he’ll love it.” Will leaned in and gave Hannibal another peck, content to cuddle in front of the fire.

___

Will awoke to sunlight streaming in the open curtains, the fire having died out at some point in the night and Will was moved so he was laying on the couch on top of Hannibal. Hannibal had fallen asleep as well, soft snoring accompanying the steady rise and fall of his chest. Winston came in, whining loudly and jumping up on top of them.

Hannibal shot up, knocking the dog off the couch as quickly as he jumped up. “He has to use the bathroom.” Will explained as he yawned, getting up off the couch. His back cracked loudly as he stretched, and he winced.

“You fell asleep and I could not find it in myself to wake you, I know you don’t often sleep through the night. Before long I found I had drifted off as well.”

“Well, next time let's move to a bed at least.” Will grumbled as he left the room, going to let Winston out into the backyard to relieve himself. He blushed when he realized that was the second time he had fallen asleep on Hannibal, and he had implied that there would be another time where he did. He rubbed a hand over his face, trying to wipe the sleep from his eyes. Those two nights were some of the best sleeps of his life. Hannibal must be over the moon that Will trusted him like that.

Will stepped back in, finding a towel left by the door to wipe of Winston’s feet, and then followed his nose to the kitchen where Hannibal was making some elaborate meal. He had changed out of his fancy suit to a red sweater and lounge pants, and Will realized he had never seen him so casual.

“What’s cookin’?” Will asked, coming up behind him and pulling him in for a hug. With annoyance, Will realized he could just barely peer his eyes over his *(Boyfriend’s? Partner’s? Sweetheart’s?)* shoulder.

“Pancakes.” Will looked at the pan, seeing that they were indeed, pancakes. Five-star, super fancy, gourmet pancakes.

“You’re foods great reheated, but I like it better fresh.” Will closed his eyes, leaning into his back.

Hannibal chuckled lightly, and Will smiled into the fabric of his sweater. His phone started going off in his pocket. Will ignored it.

“Will, that could be Jack.”

“It probably is.” Will said, leaning further into Hannibal.

“As much as I hate to say it, you should probably answer.” Will sighed, taking out his phone and answering.

“Hello?”

“Hey, we have the nurse. We need you to come in, test Gideon’s profile against the Ripper’s.”

“I’ve already done that Jack, he isn’t. He thinks he is, but he isn’t. I would look at Chilton for psychic driving.”

“Could you come in?”

“I have a full schedule today.”

“Clear it. I’m pulling into your driveway.” Will’s heart leapt to his throat.

“What? No, Jack, I’m not in Wolf Trap.” Will said quickly, he heard the engine turn off.

“Then where in the hell are you? This is more important than some girlfriend-”

“I’m at Doctor Lecter’s. I slept walked last night again.”

“Your car is still here.”

“I-I drank too much, and he told me to just stay in one of the guest rooms.” Will explained quickly.

“Right. Come in please. Or do I have to carry you out myself?”

“I’ll come in after breakfast-”

“No. Now. If you aren’t here in three hours than-”

“You’ll what? Fire me? Dock my pay?” Will’s jaw dropped. Where the hell did that snappy attitude come from? He just mouthed off to Jack. Again. Will looked up at Hannibal, the tense line of his shoulders, the anger rolling off him in waves. Damn, he had soaked it up and dished it out.

“Excuse me?”

“I’m sorry Jack, I don’t know what-”

“You’ve been awfully aggressive lately Will. I’m worried about you.” Jack interrupted him, a very serious tone coming over his words.

“Look, I’ll come in ime-” Hannibal turned around and grabbed the phone, grabbing both of Will’s wrists in one hand and securing them.

“Hello Jack. Will will come in after he has eaten and properly cared for himself.” Hannibal stated firmly. “He is beginning to neglect his body- he has quite an arrangement of responsibilities at home as well Jack. There isn’t any time for him.” Will went lax in his grip,

leaning into his shoulder. Hannibal released his wrists to put an arm around his shoulder, tangling his hand in his hair. “I know Jack, but Will has already analyzed this body, and you have the killer in custody. There is no reason Will should have to further prolong himself with Doctor Gideon.” There was a possessive blade to his voice. He didn’t like Will looking at other killers too much. “I will not further the point, he is staying here today. Goodbye.” Hannibal hung the phone up, grabbing a plate and putting the pancakes on it. “It is taken care of now. Come, lets eat.”

Hannibal tugged on Will’s arm, leading him into the dining room and setting the big plate down. Will smiled, and sat down to eat.

___

A few hours later they pulled into the driveway at Will’s house, and were greeted by the usual chorus of howling.

“They’re hungry.”

“Beverly came by last night to make sure Ripper got his meds and everyone was fed. She fed them again this morning- they just are trying to get more.” Will explained as he stepped inside, Allie scurrying up on his shoulders and trying to bat his glasses off his face. He scruffed her and set her back down, Phantom giving a very loud bark to say hello. He barreled into the living room, Will smart enough to hunker down to give him his greeting.

“Hey there big boy…” Phantom whined, barking again and wagging his tail hard enough to make his entire body shake. He then turned to Hannibal, leaping up and slamming his entire body into the Doctor.

Will expected him to fall over, but Hannibal merely held all 180 pounds of fluffy dog while it whined and barked and pulled him in closer to lick his face. Will's eyes widened in shock, not expecting nearly the amount of strength it would take to hold a wriggling dog. Phantom was then set down, Hannibal turning on his heel towards the bathroom to go wash his face. Will followed, leaning against the door frame.

“You’re hiding quite a bit of muscle under those suits, aren’t you Doctor?” He kept himself in shape. He was an active killer, most likely. He was used to stopping and holding mobile heavy force. He stopped Phantom like he was just a cat jumping onto him. Will had trouble even with Wolf sometimes.

“I keep myself healthy and in prime condition.” Hannibal smiled, toweling off his face and fixing his hair.

“That was a bit more extreme then just keeping yourself on weekly gym visits.” Will joked. “It’s rare to even see an agent do that. I certainly doubt Jack could.”

“So do I.” Hannibal said, and then no more on the matter. Will found Gremlin resting on the upstairs bed, and got one of the new sweaters to try on him. He loved it, purring intensely and loudly.

“I note the piano you have is out of tune.” Hannibal strode into the room, petting the loud feline.

“I haven’t played in ages. I just don’t have the time.” Will explained looking out the open window. “I usually use it to drown out thunderstorms. The background noise keeps them all calm and happy.”

“You have time today. Jack is sure to not bother you. I know how to tune by hand, do you have the tools?”

“Uhm, yea most of them.” Will said, not bothering to hide his starring as Hannibal rolled his sleeves up.

“Excellent, let’s start.” Hannibal walked out of the room, Will trailing after him happily.

___

Hannibal left after lunch, the piano in working order. Will had played for him while he cooked, the animals mulling about inside. Hannibal restocked his fridge before he went, giving Will another goodbye kiss that left his knees weak. Will went down to the river after, wading into the stream and fishing for a while.

He’d have to ask Hannibal what kind of fish dishes he knew.

___

At around 4am, Will woke up by his backdoor. The phone was ringing. He answered it with shaking hands.

“Hello?”

“Will, I hope to hell you’re coming in today.”

“Jack? It's not even sunrise, what’s going on?” Will tried to blink the sleep from his eyes, going into the room he had closed off while Ripper recovered. The cat was whining softly, and Will gave him some more painkillers and pet him.

“You were right. Gideon isn’t the Ripper.”

Will's blood went cold. "Please tell me why you found that out at 4 in the morning?" He could hear over the phone- something in his *house.* Was there a body?

"Miriam Lass. Someone called me, played her voice over the speaker."

Will took a breath, letting out the one he didn't know was holding. "Honestly I was expecting something much worse."

"Like?"

"Another sounder of bodies. Maybe multiple." Will said, looking at the little black cat. What was he missing?

"Get in here. Now. I'm calling the rest of the team."

"Can I wear my pajamas?"

"If it gets you here quicker I don't care if you're just in a towel."

___

Hannibal smiled as he put the last few touches on his sketch before pulling back to admire the piece. As an organized man, he color coded his sketchbooks based on their subjects. Landscapes, places, nature, figure study, and his newest edition: Will. The cover was almost the same color as his eyes, and Hannibal was already close to halfway through the book. Each sketch had a bit more detail, looked a bit more like Will. Maybe one day soon he could get the man to pose for him.

Hannibal shut his book, putting it into the bookcase in his study and going back up to bed. Making that call had reminded him of how quickly Will was able to tell the difference- see the plagiarism and rude misdeeds so present in the scene. That nurse wasn't rude, she was wonderful and well loved from what Chilton had said. She didn't deserve the treatment she was given. Will saw him so clearly- maybe he would even accept him before Hannibal had to tamper too much, before he had to isolate him and show him that Hannibal was the only one he could really lean on, regardless of his hobbies.

He sighed, knowing even as he slipped back into bed, that such a dream was too good to be true. Will had to be broken before Hannibal could fix him into something better.

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Will yawned, stepping into the lab in his fuzzy pajama pants and usual sleepwear. Winston didn't have his vest on, and the only real clothing he was supposed to be wearing in that

environment were his shoes. Beverly laughed as she saw him walk in, holding a Mcdonald's coffee in hand and several more in a tray.

“Will.” Jack warned, looking at him with an angry face.

“You said.” Will took another sip of coffee.

He sighed, rubbing his temples. “The Ripper called my house last night.” Jack explained, as Will went around the room and gave everyone a cup. They all made various noises of thanks, and Will parked himself next to Beverly.

“I’m hooked into every carrier database and telephone provider in the United States. Nothing.” Beverly twirled in her chair to face Jack.

“Look again.”

“I did my agains. And my again and again and again. I can’t find any electronic trace of any call made to your house at 2:46am.” Beverly took a long swig of her coffee. “Will, you’re a saint.”

“I am telling you that the phone rang.” Will sighed. Called in on a nightmare. He didn’t blame Jack- he knew how hard it was to tell that from reality.

“Wake your wife up?”

“I was alone.” *Live wire, Brian.* Will thought in his head, not about to say shit about his mental state.

“Whoever made that call could have made it from that little box outside your house, or a junction in your neighborhood. Either way, there would be no trace signal to track.” Jimmy reassured.

“You’re sure it was Miriam Lass?” Beverly asked, concern coating her voice like velvet. Softened all the hard edges. When she cared it didn’t feel… condescending.

“It was Miriam.”

“You haven’t heard her voice in two years Jack.”

“You gonna continue to question me on this Z?” Anger, sparking in. “If so, maybe I should ask for you to leave the room while it's still safe for you to be here.” They were in for a screaming if they continued to doubt him. Will’s eyes fluttered shut and he smiled a bit. Then Will would have more to talk about in therapy.

I wonder if I could provoke Hannibal into killing Jack.

Will’s eyes snapped back open from the state of mid-consciousness, breathing a bit heavier as he played over that thought. He wouldn’t really think that, would he? He wouldn’t want that. Would he?

“The Chesapeake Ripper recorded Miriam Lass two years ago as he was killing her. Last night, he called my house, at 2:46am. He played that recording for me.”

Will twitched a bit from where he leaned on the wall. ‘Well, than we know the Chesapeake Ripper is not Doctor Gideon, because we know the call wasn’t made from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

Beverly leaned on the wall by him. “That, we would’ve been able to trace.” she glanced over at him worriedly, rubbing his shoulder for comfort. Jack’s eyes shot up at the two of them. And Will stepped off the wall.

“Are you certain it was a recording?” Will asked. “Jack, you said yourself there’s no body.” Will would be able to tell if he got the call himself.

“Miriam Lass is dead! The Chesapeake Ripper is making it very clear that someone is plagiarizing his work!” Jack protested, and Will backed back up into the wall. Winston barked, running up to Jack and sitting on his foot to help calm him down. He smiled up at the man, tongue lolling out, open to help.

“It was 2:46 in the morning, Jack, you’re in a deep sleep, you’re roused, you’re disoriented…” Brian glanced over to Will, before looking back at Jack. “You might not even know you’re still asleep.”

“I know. When I’m. Awake!” Jack stomped his foot at Zeller, and Winston yelped as the blow landed on his tail, and scrambled to hide behind Will’s legs. “Oh, Sorry-”

“It’s fine.” Will put a hand up and turned to check on Winston. The dog whimpered, and Will clicked his tongue. “He’ll be fine.” Will said, pulling Winston into his arms and picking him up. Will walked a bit of a fast pace out of the room, cradling the large dog. He heard Jack dismiss everyone, and then Brian come up and help saddle Winston’s weight.

“Thanks, he’s just bruised, but he won’t want to walk.” Will explained.

“So we’re babying him to make him feel better?”

“Essentially yes.”

Brian nodded, patting at Winston a bit. “He’s a good boy, he deserves to be pampered. You look good with a naked face by the way. The three of us were texting about it.”

Will laughed, and nodded back where Bev and Jimmy were. “You guys wanna get something to eat? It's about 6:00, no point in going back to bed.”

“Sure. Someplace where we can order him a big plate of whatever you think will make him happy and not hurt his health.” Brian assured, slipping into a babying tone as he helped put the dog in the car.

“And I can keep on the pj’s.” Will smiled, petting Winston.

“So uhm, you have experience with being gay, right?” Will blinked dumbly.

“What?”

“You and Doctor Lecter! Well, I’m not very good at the whole expression part of it, and-”

“Will! Beans! Spill ‘em!” Beverly came up and leaned on the car behind him, Jimmy hoping into the seat next to Winston on the other side of the car.

“Guys! Wanna get breakfast?” Brian chirped, hoping in the back on the other side of Winston.

“So we’re taking my dump of a car? Beverly’s has a 90% higher chance of not breaking down with this much weight in it.” Will protested.

“Good point, grab the dog boys!” Beverly shouted, pulling out her keys and walking to her minivan. Price jumped out, following her, and Brian and Will hoisted Winston back up.

“So Will, I needed your advice! How do you actually like, do the thing?”

Will furrowed his brows, trying to decipher what was being said to him. “Sex?”

“No! No,” He let out a nervous chuckle. “The getting together part.”

Will laughed. “I have no clue. He just takes what I say and runs with it. It's been a blast with how sarcastic I am.” Will said, looking up at Brian. “Hannibal did 'the thing', I just sort of watched it happen.”

“Oh…” Brian nodded, considering something.

“Good that you’re finally gonna say something though, you’ve been eyefucking for longer than I’ve known you, and it's already killing me. I feel real bad for Bev.” Will finished just as they reached the car, going back into their positions beforehand but with Will in the front seat.

“Hope you like Disney!” Beverly said as she started the engine, racing off to some breakfast place at 6:00 in the morning, Disney songs playing loudly over the stereo. Will smiled. He loved his friends.

___

Will looked up at hoofbeats, stepping into his classroom. The ravenstag apoched, rapidly, on long spindly legs and as blood dripped from it's fur. Will’s eyes widened, the beast lowering its antlers and-

“Will?” Will snapped awake, looking up at Alana bloom. “You look like you were dreaming.” Winston whined, butting his head into Will’s lap.

“I was uh, thinking about something else.” Will explained it away, glancing up at Jack.

“Well’s here’s something for you to think about.” Jack leaned over his desk. “We have a direct way of communicating with the Chesapeake Ripper and we’d like to see if we can push him.”

Will snapped fully awake, his eyes going wide as his eyebrows shot up. “Push him towards what? A windmill full of corpses?” Will remarked, looking between Alana and Jack. Whatever body the Ripper left was going to haunt *his* nightmares, not Jacks- Will really never wanted to see a fresh Ripper scene. He was scared what it would do to him.

“We might be able to influence him to become visible.”

“If we can enrage him.” Will scoffed. No matter how angry you made the Ripper he wasn’t going to make a mistake. When he got mad it was a calm storm, made him more deadly and cruel but more careful as well.

“To what purpose Jack? I-I don’t see what you’re asking.”

“Do you think there’s a way to push the Chesapeake Ripper and focus his attention?” Will pet Winston, tangling his hand in the long hair.

“He’s already focused on Gideon as his adversary, don’t fool around. Poke him more and he’ll go for Gideon if he can get away with it and if he can’t he’ll go for you, Jack.”

“Gideon is just a tabloid rumor right now- we think we need to make him the truth. Let him come for me. We can catch him.” Will shook his head, looking away.

“He’s not gonna go for you like that Jack, he’s too smart. He’ll wind you up and watch you go. You might push him to kill again just to prove he isn’t in a hospital for the criminally insane, and this won’t be some John Doe you’ve never seen before Jack, it’ll be someone you know.” Will protested looking desperately to Alana for help.

“I have to push Will.”

“Are you thinking about getting into bed with Freddie Lounds?” Will asked. That put Freddie at a very high risk- depending on how she worded it. Last time the Ripper got an agent it was someone who Jack put in the field who wasn’t supposed to be there. Will fit that profile too easily.

“You yourself know it’s the best way to bait the real Chesapeake Ripper.” Or he could go for Hannibal or Alana, two psychiatrists Jack heavily valued the opinion of, Alana more likely- she’d be one of the people helping confirm.

Or any of his teammates, Beverly or Brian or Jimmy. Or one of Jack’s personal friends.

If the Ripper dropped another body, Will really hoped it would be Miss Lounds.

—

Will waddled into the meeting room after Jack and Alana, not really wanting to be there. He saw Freddie stick out her hand, extending a greeting, commenting on the new dog. Will wrinkled his nose, tugging Winston closer and making a point of ignoring her while he took his seat. Winston sat by his legs facing Will, his head resting on his thigh. Will wouldn't risk having to train another one.

He threw in snarky remarks whenever he saw an opening, imagining strangling her, tying her up and setting her body on fire. Watching her burn would be so sweet. Maybe feed the jerky to his dogs.

Miss Lounds called him a psychopath, pointed it out clear in the room. She wasn't wrong about Will. Alana looked worried. He *really* hoped the Ripper would get her.

Or he could. Would be so easy to step into the mindset, make it look like the Ripper. Confirm it as the Ripper. But that would make him angry, and may make Will's hounds and cats a target as well as him. Maybe even Doctor Lecter. He couldn't risk that.

But he could *hope.*

___

Will followed his students as they left the classroom, shutting the doors and dropping Winston's leash. His hands shook. He was hanging on by such a *small* thread. His phone was ringing.

"Hello?"

"Good evening, Dear Will. Would you quite mind if I came for dinner?" Hannibal's voice ringing through the phone was quite a relief. He calmed down a bit, taking a breath.

"What are we having?" He asked, watching as Winston jumped up into his chair and surfed across the room.

"A simple spaghetti dish, with homemade sausage. How was your day?"

"Sounds great. And it was, not fun. Just got out of a meeting with Freddie Lounds a couple hours ago, Jack's using her to bait the Ripper."

"Oh dear, that doesn't sound good."

Will rubbed his temples. "Jack's trying to catch an great white with a wooden pole, he's gonna end up dead in the water." Will sighed. "Or I am, Ripper would think it ironic probably, another would-be agent that really shouldn't be in the field in the field under Jack's

watch? He’s using Miriam to taunt Jack, makes sense he’d come after me.” He smiled. “Or Freddie. Either way, he’s gonna make sure Jack regrets ever thinking Gideon was him.”

“Identity theft is rather rude.” Will laughed, the sound slightly unhinged. "If you are at risk Will, I would ask you withdraw from this case."

“I doubt I am, I'm making it very clear I don't believe Gideon is the Ripper. Freddie's at higher risk then me. I bet you had a better day than mine.”

Hannibal sighed audibly on the other line. “Not quite, the news today was rather distressing and a patient of mine is getting quite... attached.”

“Do you want me to come out to Baltimore instead? Save you the added stress of cooking in my rundown kitchen.”

“No, I’m already in the neighborhood.” He heard Hannibal’s car door close in the background. That was odd- usually the Bentley was quieter.

“Really?”

“The mechanic I like runs a shop down here, it’s not too far from your house but I’m afraid I must arrive by taxi. I’m getting the ingredients for dinner right now.”

“Ah, I see. Well, the dogs will be glad to see you. I think Ripper misses you.” Will started packing his things, preparing to meet Hannibal at his house. “I may be a bit- you still have the spare key?”

“Of course, I must go now as well. Goodbye Will.”

“Bye.” Will hung up, pocketing his phone and tugging his bag over his shoulder before grabbing Winston.

“You hear that boy? Homemade sausage. He probably is bringing a buttload of scraps too!" Will froze. Hannibal said he was going to the grocery store, but he already the sausage was homemade? “Maybe he’s getting fresh herbs or the spaghetti or some fancy ingredient that doesn’t travel well.” Will rationalized. But he couldn’t shake the feeling- something was off.

He had just buckled his seatbelt when Jack called.

“Will, I want you and the team at my house in three and a half hours. I sent Beverly earlier, she’s gonna search the outside.”

Will furrowed his eyebrows, glancing back at Winston. “Why? What's wrong?”

“The Ripper just called me from my house Will- I’m at the Baltimore State Hospital- I’m coming as quick as I can.”

“Oh god, oh no Jack…” Will realized a bloodbath would probably be waiting.

“I called my wife, she’s still on her trip.”

“Thank fucking hell.” Will mumbled, pulling out and driving. “I have some stuff to take care of at home first, but I’ll be there quick as I can.”

“Wait until I’m there- I want your first impressions on the scene. I’ll call when you need to leave.”

“Thanks.” Will hung up, and kept driving. He was getting a headache.

—

Will pulled up to his house and saw his dogs running about outside, Hannibal stepping onto the porch. Will let Winston out to greet him, and followed up.

“Jack needs me tonight.” A shred of panic. Quickly hidden but Will felt it. “I’ll be okay, and we don’t know if anyone was killed or who they were. The Ripper called Jack from his house, he wants me to get a read on everything fresh.” Will said with fake enthusiasm. He rubbed his eyes, stepping up the steps of the porch and easily falling into a hug. He sighed and melted into the embrace, leaning heavily on Hannibal.

“Did you sleep last night?”

“Jack called me at 4am. Said the Ripper called him and I needed to come in.” He yawned. Hannibal tutted.

“Anything short of three corpses wouldn’t allow me to let you out of this house again until you’ve properly rested.”

Will laughed a bit. “Why, Doctor, by then the Ripper won’t be ripping anymore. He kills in sounders. Like pigs.” Will explained. “That's what people are too him- pigs.”

“Were you sleepwalking last night?” Hannibal asked, pulling back a bit to look him in the eye.

“Only a bit, just to my kitchen. The phone woke me."

“I believe sleepwalking was part of our agreement for things-that-I-can-pull-you-out-on-account-of. You can go tomorrow morning, but I’m staying tonight and ensuring you sleep.”

“Mmm.” Will followed Hannibal back inside, a fire lit in its place and the kitchen alive and bright with the sounds of cooking. “Smells great.” Hannibal took his coat off and kissed him gently, running his fingers through Will’s curls before walking back into the kitchen. Will noticed a book open on the table, a deep blue cover and the pages covered in drawings of him. Drawing tools were lain beside it, a scalpel instead of a sharpener accompanying the set of charcoal pencils.

Will sat in front of it, admiring the half finished work of himself sitting with Winston. Hannibal came back out with a glass of wine, and froze. Panic, he was probably curseing himself for forgetting he left it out. Whoops.

“This is really good. You actually make me look attractive.” Will joked, coming to take the glass and give him a peck on the cheek.

“I merely draw what my eyes see Will. You are a work of art.” Hannibal ran his fingers along his cheekbone. “I brought it so I may try my hand at a live reference, instead of memory.”

It was spoken like a question, and Will’s eyebrows shot up. “You drew that from memory? I thought you bribed Bev to get a reference photo or something.” Will wasn't sure which was less creepy.

“All of my pieces are drawn from memory or from a live model.” Hannibal stated proudly. “I have different books to sort different subjects, so when I find old completed books I know what I’ll be looking at inside and I can find old pieces easier.”

“So blue is what? People? Will asked, walking back over to the book. “Can I have a peak at the others?”

“Blue is, uhm.” There was a bit of panic again, hesitation. He was blushing too. Hannibal was nervous. “Blue is just you. And yes, you may.” Hannibal said, carefully watching Will’s reactions. Will flipped back through the book, taking care with the pages, and found himself a bit shocked.

“This is… alot of me.” Will stated, looking at the drawings. “You’ve almost filled this entire book.”

“I find myself unable to draw anything but you sometimes- you have become a focal point in my art.” Hannibal still looked nervous, twitchy. Will smiled.

“It’s…" Will debated for a moment, choosing his next words carefully. "...really endearing. I’m flattered. Don’t think I deserve to be drawn this well or this many times, but it's… it's sweet.” Will reassured, setting it down and stepping over to give Hannibal another kiss. “Thank you.” If he remained open and happy with Hannibal's actions, especially his more questionable ones, that would make him more of an asset. Someone to trust.

“The pleasure is mine.” Hannibal stated, holding him close and breathing in. Will realized he was smelling him again. “I brought another gift for you.” Hannibal stated. Will sighed.

“I can’t afford to keep up with this-”

“Then don’t pay me back with gifts. Let me draw you.” Will sighed.

“I’d let you do that anyway-”

“Gifts are not meant to be bribes Will. They’re meant to show affection. I find myself aching daily for your smile and wanting to do anything to see it put there. I am in no short of funds.” Hannibal handed him another box, running his fingers through Will’s hair again.

“Okay. Thank you. It really does mean alot to me.” Will smiled.

“You haven’t opening it yet, dear Will.”

Will laughed. “I know, I’m just trying to smile more so you don’t blow your fortune buying me stuff.” Will joked as he opened the box, finding some very expensive looking fly-tying gear. “Wow, these are really nice! Thank you!” There was a smidgen of guilt for a moment and then it was gone- Will assumed it was from realizing that he exposed his snooping.

It wasn’t.

“I must finish dinner preparations, go clean yourself up a bit, get comfortable. You aren’t leaving this house again tonight.”

“Okay, I’ll text Jack and let him know.”

“Turn off your phone after.” He was worried about something. Will smiled, feeling warm in his chest.

“Don’t worry, I will.”

—

Will shut his phone off just as it began to ring, stepping under the spray of the shower. Cecelia stepped in behind him, as she did, and began to groom herself. He shook his head at her fondly. Some things never grew old.

His house phone went off twice before it stopped, and Will sighed in relief. Hannibal would deal with Jack.

Will stepped out of the shower and dried off, realizing that all his clothes were in his drawer in the living room. *Son of a fuck.* Will stepped quietly as he could down the stairs, making it to the drawer in the living room before turning around and nearly dropping his towel.

“Jesus fucking *christ* your quieter than a cat!” Will jumped back, Hannibal standing in the door to the kitchen. He was eerily still, standing there, staring intently at him. Will couldn’t get a read on him no matter how hard he tried. “I uhm, didn’t bring any clothes with me, so I’ll just, uhm, yeah.” Will slipped back up the stairs, clutching his towel and trying not to flush a brighter shade of red.

He went into the cat play room, shutting the door behind him and putting on his underwear. That was… odd. Will looked down at his underpants, this pair surprisingly devoid of holes or stains. They looked, and felt, *new.* He took them off, looking for a tag or something, but couldn’t find any. They looked much higher quality than his others, but nearly identical. He’d have to compare some other time, when he didn’t have his obsessive boyfriend waiting for him with dinner downstairs.

Oh.

Oh. Will covered his face with his hands. He really should have expected this. He had half a mind to go and look anyway, see how many other pairs of underwear had been snuck in. Will

mumbled grumpily to himself, putting on the most certainly new and probably very expensive briefs disguised to look like his 99 cents store flimsy rags.

They were thicker and warmer than his others at the least, and Will went back down and looked back in the drawer. From a glance, it didn't look like practically *any* pairs were kept. Will grabbed the first shirt he saw, glancing discreetly in the trash cans.

"I have dinner ready and plated."

Will jumped, whirling around to face Doctor Lecter. "I should put a bell on your neck, jeez."

"I am sorry to have startled you." Will nodded, debating whether or not to draw attention to the new gift.

Ignorance is bliss. Maybe later. "It smells great, as always." Will smiled, walking to the table and sitting down. "I wonder what I did to be able to eat five-star meals every night." Will joked, waiting for Hannibal to take his seat. Manners were very important to Doctor Lecter.

"And I wonder what I did to be graced with the honor of serving them to you."

Will laughed, digging into his meal happily. The weird quirks and obsessive tendencies would be well worth it in the end, Will thought.

He just might even fall in love with this man.

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Will had fallen asleep soundly after dinner, the pills Hannibal slipped into his wine working their magic quite well. There would be no nightmares to disturb him, nothing but a deep restful sleep. He wouldn't wake until well into the morning. Hannibal smiled when he remember how readily Will had given him permission to draw him. Not that he needed it, but it was a reassuring sign that Will wasn't bothered by how much time Hannibal had devoted to just putting his image down on paper.

Presumably as well, Jack had not found any evidence at his home that Hannibal may have missed. Bringing Miriam there had been a very risky move, however the payoff was worth it.

Hannibal started to move his pencil along the paper, tracing the faint outlines of Will's content expression. The encephalitis- Hannibal had no doubts to it, his nose had never been wrong- was a development. Hannibal could go through with framing him much easier, and then Will would not be able to do anything when he figured out what Hannibal was. And Hannibal could play the part of the concerned friend, never giving up on Will even when he said such horrible things.

Eventually Will would stop fighting against him.

Or he could swoop in, save the day, and brainwash him while treating the encephalitis. Hannibal was less inclined for that route- he wanted Will at his basest form, brainwashing would just burry that further.

Will *was* like him. He just needed to figure out how to show him that. Right now he was Jack's loyal bloodhound, and he wouldn't be swayed against the morals beaten into him from such a young age without some coaxing.

The dogs started barking, Will still snoring, and Hannibal rose to greet whoever just pulled up in their car. He stepped out, closing the door behind him, and walked to greet Jack.

"Doctor Lecter, Hello. I need to borrow Will."

"I'm afraid I can't let you do that Jack, not tonight. He needs rest. Let him come in tomorrow instead." Hannibal offered an alternative. Jack didn't take it.

Jack walked towards the house, determination in his eyes. Hannibal caught his arm. "Doctor, this is the Chesapeake Ripper. Will could catch him!"

"I know. I also know that if he neglects his self care to do so then he will break. Catching the Ripper is not worth Will's sanity."

The look in Jack's eyes said he disagreed. "I know Chilton wouldn't give me the same statement."

The *audacity.* Hannibal's eyes narrowed. "I know Will wouldn't talk to Chilton. You've used him too much Jack, let him have a break. Just for a night."

"The Ripper was in my house. I'm sleeping in a goddamn hotel tonight, because he probably brought Miriam Lass's corpse into my bedroom!" Jack's voice rose steadily, the dogs barking increasing in volume as well. The door behind them creaked open, and they turned to look.

Will's eyes were lowered, and he stumbled out rather clumsily. Phantom and Winston were whining at his heels, Phantom bodily blocking him from falling down the steps on his porch.

Hannibal tutted. He was sleepwalking again.

"Will, put on some pants we need to go." Will didn't respond, stumbling down the stairs. Hannibal helped steady him at the bottom, tilting his head up and looking in his eyes.

"He's sleepwalking Jack." Hannibal turned away from the glazed over blue to face Jack. "Again." Will leaned forward, mumbling something and holding onto Hannibal.

"Wake him up."

"No. I'm taking him back inside, where he will sleep, and I'll take him to your house in the morning after he wakes up and eats a balanced breakfast."

"We can save more lives if we go now."

“Will can see better when he’s properly slept, bathed, and eaten. You will find he works much better and deals with stress easier when he’s healthy. Goodnight Jack.” Hannibal scooped Will up, walking back up the steps with a single whistle. The dogs obeyed happily, more than used to Hannibal.

“Doctor Lecter-” Hannibal turned to see Jack put a foot on the first step, Buster dashing out and barking up a storm at him. He went for the ankles, Jack running back to his car to avoid the dogs teeth.

“Buster.” Hannibal whistled once, then twice. A third time made Buster run back inside, Hannibal shutting the door behind them. He lay Will back in bed, tucking him in and positioning him as he was before, sitting back down to continue his drawing.

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“We found her hair on the pillow and prints on the phone.” Beverly explained over the phone. “Jack was really freaked out. There were indentations like someone slept there.”

“I would be freaked out too if the Ripper put a corpse in my bed, I’m just glad there aren’t any new ones.”

“I don’t know why Jack is so insistent you go to his house and look, there's nothing you can use there. I’m gonna drop by with a copy of everything we found and let you deal with it.”

“Okay. Have you had breakfast? I can ask Hannibal to make extra for you.”

“Hold on- you guys slept together *again?* Did something at least happen this time?”

Will rubbed a hand over his face to hide his blushing, “No, I feel asleep as soon as my back hit the mattress.” He scowled as she started laughing. “Hey, Jack’s making me work some crazy hours.”

“You and me both. He told me when he came by to drag you out you were sleepwalking again.” Will gulped. “You’re kinda worrying me, you doing okay?”

“I’m fine, I slept like a baby last night.” Will yawned, as if to emphasize his point. “You want breakfast or not?”

“Of course I do, Doctor Lecter is a great cook. See you soon pal.”

“Bye.” Will hung up the phone, waddling into the kitchen. “Bev says she’s coming by for breakfast, that okay?” He leaned against the doorframe, yawning loudly.

“Of course, I made enough for three.” Hannibal turned the oven on, adjusted some raw sausages on a plate by the eggs and a bowl, and walked over and gave Will a goodmorning kiss.

“I haven’t brushed my teeth yet, sorry.”

“I don’t mind.” Hannibal reassured him, bringing him in by his hair again. Will smiled into the kiss, leaning up on his toes. They broke apart when the doorbell rang.

“Beverly was closer than I thought.” Will remarked, walking over and opening the door.

“Hey! You’re looking better.” Beverly exclaimed, pushing past him to get inside with a file in her hands. “Hello Doctor Lecter! Wow, I don’t think I’ve *ever* seen Will with his eye bags this light, it's a lovely shade on you.” Beverly joked, running a finger over the skin there that was, admittedly, much less dark and unseemly.

“Good Morning Miss Katz.”

Phantom gave a happy bark, running down and greeting Beverly with a wagging tail. The other dogs followed suit, crowding around her knees. “How’s our new little kitty friend?”

“Still on bed arrest.” Will explained, motioning over to the closed door. “I was about to go feed him and give him some more meds, he should be better in four to six weeks, the vet said. That's when he gets his cast off.”

“Aww, Can I help?” Will rolled his eyes and nodded, Beverly and him grabbing the cat food and medication and entering the room together.

Ripper hissed at her, limping over and rubbing Will’s ankle with his cheek anyway.

“Poor baby.” She sat down as Will did, and handed him the medication and food. She was quiet for a moment, seemingly thinking. “Hannibal named him?”

“Yeah, Ripper.”

“Hmm.” Will read her emotions, a slight worry, an inner conflict. “Has he been good to you?” Quiet, honest, worried. Very worried. She was suspicious.

“He’s been great. He's making sure I eat, sleep, shower…”

“He’s fought Jack for you and won.” Sad, determined. She made a decision. About something. She brightened up, giving a smile. “Let’s go eat whatever he’s made for breakfast, eh?” Beverly got up, taking his hand and leaving the room.

“*Will.”* Hannibal was *very* indignant looking, and Will could feel the irritation flowing off him in waves.

“Uhm… What happened?”

“You have a bunch of troublemakers in your house- have you taught *none* of them manners?” He scolded, pointing to a very happy looking Maroomba sitting next to Buster.

“Oh no, what did they do?” Will asked, trying not to laugh.

“Salem decided that the sausages would be a fun thing to knock off the counter, and then *those two* descended upon them like a pack of wolves. And now, we are out of a breakfast.”

Beverly snickered behind her hand, her humor barely concealed. Will bit the inside of his cheek walking into the kitchen. “I guess we’ll have to improvise.”

Buster barked, happily wagging his tail and trotting out of the kitchen. Hannibal’s hands twitched, still a very unhappy expression plastered on his face.

“I’ll make pancakes.” Beverly started getting out the necessary ingredients.

“It’s not healthy to eat those too often-”

“But, they taste great.” Beverly interrupted Hannibal’s protests, whisking the flour and such together. “They make you happy too- endorphins and all that.”

Hannibal stepped into the kitchen, reaching for the bowl. “I’m not sure-”

“Shut up and let me make my friend pancakes. *God,* it's like you don't want him to have a good morning, we’re gonna have to look at case files right after and don’t you think he deserves something a bit more sweet than sausages?” Beverly ducked under his arm, before turning and pulling him out of the kitchen.

“I never suggested that Will should have anything but the best-”

“And pancakes *are* the best! Right Will?” Will was going to die of laughter. He nodded, giggling as quietly as he could. “So we’re gonna have pancakes, topped with butter and powdered sugar and whipped cream-”

Hannibal wrinkled his nose in disgust. “I have taken it upon myself to improve Will’s diet, and those kinds of food have been removed from the house-” Hannibal began to prattle on about how bad canned and overly sugary or processed food was, and Will slipped upstairs to the mini fridge where he kept the animal food and meds and such. He shoved the vat of dog food out of the way, pulling out the Ready Whip and shaking it as he walked back downstairs.

“But Doc, he can just like, eat more of the healthy food to combat it! A strawberry for every bite of cream!”

“That's not how it *works-”* Hannibal was now making the batter, actually going through with pancakes.

“I got the whipped cream.” Will put the container on the table, and let out a laugh at Hannibal’s indignant expression.

"Will.”

—

They ate breakfast, Hannibal finally relenting that they could have the canned cream if next time he made actual whipped cream. Beverly and Hannibal got along like one might imagine siblings would act after they were all grown up and lost the need for playing pranks or blaming each other for the missing cookie.

“Jack’s really freaked out about all this. The Ripper broke into his home, laid a corpse on his bed, or made it look like he did, and called him twice now with this recording.”

“Whoever made that call thinks Jack was close to Miriam Lass. And regrets what happened to her- Jack knew he was sending her after the Ripper, right?” Will looked over the documents, everything they found.

“She was brought in on the Ripper case, yeah. He seems like guilt is tearing him up from the inside with all of this.” Beverly sighed. “You’d think that’d make him gentler on you.”

Will smiled, Beverly rubbing her hand up and down his back. “I would hope so too. I will have to be heading back to Baltimore after breakfast- I have a dinner tonight with some colleagues and I have to prepare." Hannibal give Will a light kiss on his forehead, clearing the table for him.

Beverly gave Will a look, and he rolled his eyes at her. “I think this is pretty much irrefutable. Gideon isn’t the Ripper.”

“Well, you were convinced of that the moment you saw the nurse, so it's not that hard fo you too see the evidence that way. Chilton doesn’t.”

“God, what does he need to see it, a hunk of Miriam Lass to show up? Jesus christ, things are gonna get bad if they keep this up.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Ripper does not like to be taken lightly, he hates plagiarism, an affront to basic courtesy. Chilton will find himself in a tableau and the Ripper will put him there.”

A flare of amusement from Hannibal. The stag huffed outside Will’s window,

—

Hannibal left shortly after breakfast, and having absolutely nowhere to go with the case Beverly and Will simply decided to make a pillow fort in the living room. After about an hour of frustration because the dogs thought it was fun to knock it down, Beverly’s cell rang.

“Jack?” Her brows furrowed with worry. “Again? Alright, I’ll bring Will in- yes he’s right here…” She laughed, awkwardly, “No he isn’t… Right sir, we’ll be in as soon as possible. Bye.” She hung up. “Asshole’s really expecting me to take his side with this whole ‘Will should take care of himself first’ fight he’s having with Hannibal.”

Will rolled his eyes. “I’m with Jack on that one sometimes.” Will said, leading Beverly out of the house, not bothering to lock the door.

“You *can’t* be serious!” Will picked up his pace a bit, making it to her car. “Will, you’re aware of the fact that you’re a human being right? And that means that you have needs?”

“Jack needs me to help save lives.”

“That isn’t worth the cost of your own.” Beverly hugged him, pulling his head down to rest on her shoulder. “You told me you’d jump ship if it got too much.” She whispered, tugging on his hair. “Don’t break that promise.”

“I’ll try.”

—

The two were barley in the doors of the FBI before they were ushered out again into the black vans. The caller this time left a location- they wanted this place to be discovered.

“The last call was made by a disposable cell traced here. Or within a hundred feet of here.” She looked at the observatory. “If there's a body it's a good chance it’s someone we know.”

“Brian and Jimmy answering their phones?”

“Yeah. Jack called-”

Will’s phone went off. “It’s Hannibal- he says that I’m invited to dinner but he understands if I want to stay home- Chilton will be there.”

“So he’s safe.”

“If there’s a body, it's gotta be Jack’s wife-”

“Or Alana Bloom.” Beverly looked at him, putting a hand on his shoulder. “Let me check first. I’ll warn you.” Will took a breath, looking away. “It won’t affect me like it affects you.”

“What was Miriam Lass looking into?”

“Medical records- if the Ripper was a surgeon there’s a chance he may have treated one of his victims.”

“Have they retraced her steps?”

“The ones they could find. She made a jump somewhere they couldn’t explain.” She looked up at him. “You make those jumps.”

“The evidence has to be there- The evidence here says we may find Miriam Lass behind those doors. I think she may be- or may have been- alive.”

“Holding her captive? Don’t let Jack hear you say that. And the evidence in the medical records is that there isn't any. Any surgeon that has come into contact with any of the Ripper victims has been vetted or is currently under observation.”

“Including Doctor Gideon?” Will joked, the two coming to a stop in front of Jack.

“Doctor Gideon wasn’t in my bedroom; The Chesapeake Ripper was. The last call left something the others didn’t- a phone number.” Jack started, pulling out his phone and presumably calling the number. They heard ringing. Will’s heart dropped to his stomach. He saw the faint outlines of the stag, pacing at the edges of the forest. Beverly shoved in in front of Will, taking the place behind Jack. He smiled at her.

Jack saw it first, Beverly relaxed her shoulders, shaking her head at him and letting him walk by.

An arm, laid out pale and severed, clutching the still ringing cell phone. Will took a shaky breath. A note below it, in beautiful calligraphy, read ‘What do you see?’. A shiver went up Will’s spine. The Ripper was out to play.

Sorbet

Chapter Summary

Will meets one of Hannibal's patients. The Ripper rips.

Chapter Notes

Rating probably gonna go up next chapter. I almost lost this one too, right before upload, so that was SCARY. Also disclaimer: I have never had wine in my entire goddamn life and all descriptions are from my fumbling about google.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will whistled and pointed at the light switch after he finished his lecture on the Ripper, Winston running and going to turn it on for him. His phone chirped, and Will pulled it out to check his messages.

Hannibal (12:00): Dinner? I have tickets to an opera. A black tie event, your regular suit would work or I could come get you and we could get a better one. - HL

Will snorted. That was Hannibal talk for ‘let me buy you a new suit’.

Will (12:01): Sure, my last class gets out at 2:00.

Hannibal (12:01): I will be waiting. -HL

Will rolled his eyes. Hannibal had a thing about texting him on the hour to start conversations. It was oddly endearing.

___

Will felt eyes on them the entire performance, and he was unable to relax. The new suit was comfortable, conveniently already dry cleaned and tailored to him, ready for him to just put it on and go. Hannibal actually shed a tear during the performance, lost in the music. Will wasn’t quite so at ease.

He stood after the performance, first one out of his seat. Will rose with him, without hesitation. The singer bowed, and after the performance everyone filled out of the theater to the gallery, to socialize.

“You know Hannibal, you could be a bit more discreet when it comes to my wardrobe.” Will joked, playfully pushing at him while still keeping their arms intertwined.

“Whatever do you mean, my dear Will?”

Will rolled his eyes. “The suit was premade, I’ve noticed several of my shirts replaced by material I cannot afford, and then there's my underwear-”

“I just want you to be comfortable. I was afraid you’d refuse the gifts or pull away from their oddity.” Hannibal was blushing, the tips of his ears pink.

“Mmm it’d take a very lot to get me to pull away from you at all at this point. I don’t think I’ve been happier in my life.” Now it was Will’s turn to blush, realizing the true admission of the statement. Hannibal seemed happy enough, painting the air around him with a lovely symphony of joy. Will smiled- at least he wasn’t the weird one this time.

Misses Komeda found them a bit later, chatting with Hannibal while Will people watched. Will quite liked her- she had a sharp tongue and a good eye-, but he wanted to know who had been eyeing them during the performance.

“It’s been too long since you’ve properly cooked for us, Hannibal.” She stated, tilting up her head like a preening swan.

“Come over and I will cook for you.”

“I said *properly* , means dinner and the show.” Will perked his eyebrows, clearly interested. “Have you seen him cook? It’s an entire performance!” She turned back on Hannibal, Will could see a playfulness in her eyes and smirked. “He used to throw such exquisite dinner parties.” Hannibal’s attention snapped back to her, affronted. “You heard me. Used to.”

Will hid his giggles behind the glass of champagne, Komeda catching his eye and winking. “And I will again, once inspiration strikes.”

“You’ve got more inspiration than the old masters! A perfect muse, sitting right there on your arm.” Will rolled his eyes at her, playfully batting his lashes up at Hannibal.

“I cannot force a feast, a feast must present itself.” Will looked at him curiously. He loved attention, practically lived off praise. He loved cooking for others. Money wasn’t an issue, so what was it?

“It’s a dinner party, not a unicorn.” Will almost spat out his drink.

“Oh, but the feast is life, you put the life in your belly and you live.” Will wondered if all rich people talk was this pretentious- he usually wasn’t paying attention but it was always fun to see Hannibal so flustered by people he respects. She gave a fake laugh, and looked to the side.

Oh, Hello.

“I believe this young man is trying to get your attention.” Will recognized the stare of the taller of the two men, the weight he had felt on the back of his neck. He felt Hannibal close up beside him, the most uncomfortable he had ever felt from him. Will regarded the shorter man with sharp eyes, he was pudgy and soft looking, timid. Probably with an anxiety disorder.

“Hello.” Will’s eyes widened. That was the least enthusiastic greeting he had ever seen from Hannibal. Will had to know more.

“Hi, so good to see you.” The pudgy man took Hannibal's hand to shake it, not offered. He had at least an admiration for Hannibal, most likely more. He wasn’t even looking at Will. The taller man was, his gaze had not faltered. “This is my friend Tobias.”

“Good evening.” Will studied him carefully behind his glasses. This man was a killer. Hannibal actually put out his hand for him- a respect between monsters.

“How do you two know each other.” Misses Komeda asked, delighting in how disgruntled Hannibal was. Will was too, but he knew the answer to that question.

“There should remain some mystery to my life outside the opera.”

“I’m one of his patients.” Will almost snorted again, the micro expressions and emotions he was getting that this man seemed oblivious too were almost too much.

“Oh.” Komeda took another sip of her champagne, obviously not expecting just how oblivious he was.

“Did you enjoy the performance?”

“I did, I loved it, every minute.” The pudgy man bounced on the heels of his feet like an excited child.

“His eyes kept wandering. More interested in you than what was happening onstage.” Tobias elaborated, and Will cleared his throat.

“I’m sorry, how rude of me. Tobias, Franklyn, this is my partner, Will.” Will batted his lashes, reaching out and shaking each of their hands. He could feel the shock coming off Hannibal.

“How do you do?”

“Very well.” Franklyn fidgeted uncomfortably, looking back and forth between Will, Hannibal and how Will was holding onto Hannibal’s arm.

“I read about you, on Tattlecrime dot com.” Tobias said, and the smile dropped from Will’s face.

“Oh?”

“You’re an unofficial profiler for the FBI?” Tobias asked, taking a step forward.

Will took a step back. “I mostly teach.”

“A profiler? Hannibal, you didn’t tell me he could do that too!” Komeda playfully scolded, moving just enough to block Tobias a bit from the conversation.

“Is it scary? Horrifying?”

“You get used to it.” Will smiled halfway, retreating a bit to stand just behind Hannibal while still beside him.

“Apparently he can slip into a killers mind and think like them, wear their skin as his own. It’s very fascinating.” Tobias continued, stepping around Misses Komeda. Franklyn was the image of worry, sweat dripping down his brow and ringing his hands. Will brought his shield up, not needing any more worry or self doubt in his head. Like this he couldn’t read Hannibal as well, but at least his own head would be safe.

“Speaking of, I’m afraid Will does have to teach tomorrow morning, so if you’ll excuse us. Franklyn, good to see you. Tobias.” Hannibal dismissed them both with a tilt of his head. “A pleasure as always, Misses Komeda.” Hannibal kissed the back of her hand, and then lead Will swiftly out.

“Make sure he gets that unicorn darling!” Komeda called after Will, smiling. Will turned back to give her a wave, having to run a bit too keep up with Hannibal.

Will turned to him in the parking lot, a mischievous smile on his face. “Was that the ‘attached’ patient you mentioned?”

Hannibal gave him a perturbed look, annoyance heavy and clear on his features. Will laughed. “I am highly considering giving him a referral. The only problem is that so many other psychiatrists have heard of him or treated him and do not want anything to do with him.”

“Like a game of old maid, you’re stuck with him.”

“Precisely.” Will giggled, realizing that even if he wanted too Hannibal couldn’t kill Franklyn- the man was too closely tied to him. “I didn’t like his friend either. Rude of him to bring up such things.”

Will sighed, leaning on Hannibal’s shoulder. “It’s bound to happen from time to time- especially from someone like him.”

“What do you mean?”

Will hesitated, not wanting to show the true strength of his talents just yet. “Sometimes, you can just see it in their eyes. The need for bloodshed, the violence.”

Hannibal paused, considering his words. “You believe Mister Budge to be a killer?”

“He has the potential. Whether or not he uses it I can’t say, I’m not psychic.” Will lied, Tobias had killed before. He didn’t hide it as well as Hannibal did- he had a pride in his work he couldn’t keep quiet. He would get himself caught eventually, just to show that he could escape.

Will rubbed his temples, he was getting another headache.

——

Hannibal dropped him off back at his house, giving him a gentle kiss goodnight and taking his leave to let Will rest. Will took care of his furry friends, Ripper got his cast off in two weeks. Will smiled as he looked around his house. It was nicer than it had been three months ago- there were little gifts and trinkets given to him by Hannibal, Beverly’s jacket left on the couch, two new dogs and a new cat, and a happy air around him.

Will took a shower, barley into bed before his phone went off loudly. He cured as he picked it up, caller ID reading Jack Crawford. He pulled himself out of bed and got dressed.

——

“The victim was found in a hotel room bathtub. There were abdominal mutilations and organ removal on the scene.”

“Sounds more like an urban legend than the Ripper, no?” Will had a feeling this wasn’t done by the Ripper. He felt he was busy somehow.

“I’ve had the room sealed. You’ll get it fresh.”

“Fresh?” Will smiled, “Fresh as a daisy?”

“Fresh enough for you to tell me whether or not it's the Ripper. Then you can go back to class.”

“Oh, you don’t want me in a classroom. You want me to wrap my head so tight around the Ripper I won’t go back to class until he’s caught.”

“Your bad luck that you’re the best, pal.”

Will was silent for a moment, petting Winston as he watched the cars go by. “Expecting another couple bodies after this one?”

“If it's the Ripper, yes, I am.”

“Don’t let the Ripper stir you up.” Will warned. “The reason he left you Miriam Lass’s arm is so he could poke you with it.”

“Why not the rest of her?” Jack questioned. Will felt himself slip into his mindset, looking through the Ripper’s eyes. It felt too familiar.

“His other victums… he wanted to humiliate in death, like a public dissection. She was different.

“Probably impressed that she was able to find him.” Jack turned to him with worry in his eyes. “He may be starting another cycle Will.”

“The Ripper contacted you directly. If he was killing again, he wouldn’t be subtle about it; he would just pick up the phone.” Will cocked his head, looking at Jack from the corner of his eye. “Any more phone calls, Jack?”

“No. Look, if this is the Ripper, then there’ll be two more bodies and then nothing for months, maybe even years. We’ll have a window of opportunity to catch him and that window will close. The last time the window closed I lost the Ripper and I lost Miriam Lass. I don’t intend to do that again. You keep me updated on everything. I don’t care if it's just a hunch, or something that you think I will know already you tell me. I lost Miriam because she made a leap and didn’t guide me to take the same steps.”

Will felt the real meaning behind the words, the danger. “I’ll be sure to let you know.”

—

Will kept his head down as he swiftly entered the building behind Jack, turning away from local police after Jack’s explanation and handing them Winston, and stepping into the crime scene. Beverly smiled up at him from where she was collecting evidence on the floor, warm and calming.

“Has anyone touched the body?”

“For once, local police behaved themselves.” Zeller answered, giving Will a friendly pat on the back and a smile.

“It’s fairly evident the man’s dead just by looking at him.” Price joked.

“I touched the body.” Beverly wiggled her eyebrows at Will. “A lot going on with that body.” She continued as she rose to her feet, standing behind Will and facing jack’s disappointment head on. “Surgery was performed, and then un-performed.”

“Surgery was performed with bare hands, the sutures were clawed open.” Jack’s gaze snapped to Zeller, who looked sheepishly at the floor. “Ah, I uh, uhm, also… I also did a little bit of touching.” He stuttered out.

“Pieces of him were torn off from the bed to the bathroom, like breadcrumbs.” Will walked into the bathroom, taking off his glasses before kneeling next to the body.

Already, he knew this wasn’t a Ripper kill. He wasn’t displayed, not in the typical way a victim was displayed. This wasn’t art, not in the scale it was from the Ripper. At most it could be considered a child with crayons messing about on fancy paper, not nearly the Masterpieces the Ripper produced. This lacked the beauty of it. “Surgery wasn’t performed here- there would be a lot more blood.”

Beverly smiled, “If he’s moving his victims, he could be performing the mutilations in the same transport.”

“Find the car, find the killer.” Jimmy gave Beverly a high five, and Will looked closer at the body.

“He tore open his own sutures.” The sutures were done to close him back up- he was supposed to survive this.

“It wasn’t to get to his kidney. The Ripper already took it with him. Or her.” Beverly was nervous. That was… odd.

“I’d say him.” Brian nodded in agreement, and Will hummed.

“What did he take out of the chest?” Nothing.

“Going for the heart. Probably interrupted- It's intact. Traumatized, but it's intact.” It wasn’t a bad assumption, but it was wrong.

“Everybody out.” Jack spoke, herding people out of the room to give Will some privacy. He sighed. Tonight had been hard enough, he’d rather have had Hannibal stay over and then keep him home. Will should feel guilty about not wanting to catch these people- but could you really blame him with what it was doing to him?

He closed his eyes and let the pendulum swing.

___

The ravenstag lead me into the apartment, it's place here just a suggestion- it didn’t belong here. This wasn’t it’s work. This was something much younger, possibly his first kill.

This was unintentional.

Signs of a struggle indicate a sudden emergence from deep sedation.

The man was tearing at his own wounds, horrified by what had been done, he charged me, pinning me to the wall. I pushed back, we tumbled into the bathroom. The man slammed against the wall and fell into the tub.

He was going into shock.

His heart seized up, I tore open the man's shirt further to open his chest. I opened his chest wall, I spread the ribs, I take his heart in my hand.

Internal cardiac massage.

___

Will opened his eyes, what he just saw confirming what he already knew to be true. This was an accident.

“Jack?” He called, turning away from the body. He had been spared, thankfully, the horror of a fresh kill from the Ripper. “This wasn’t brutal. The killer wasn’t killing; he was trying to save his life. The Ripper ever do that?” Beverly crept in slowly behind Jack, rubbing a hand gently up and down his back to ground him. He took a breath, smiling gingerly at her.

Brian rolled his eyes from where he stood in the doorframe. “It's the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“It's not the Ripper.”

“There are too many similarities.”

“There aren’t enough. Look, you know Star Wars, I know murders.”

Brian barked out a laugh. “You really think that this is an effort to save a life?”

“The killer is young, probably a medical student trying to make an extra buck in a back alley surgery.” Will explained, turing to look at the team. Brian laughed, arching a brow.

“Are you sure?” Jack asked, voice grave.

“Yes. Claiming these are Ripper kills will only provoke him into actually striking.”

“Tell me why you’re sure.”

“The Ripper left a victim in a church pew using his tongue as a page marker in the bible he was holding. This isn’t that.”

Brian nodded, conceding his point. “That’s not to say he won’t keep doing it.” Beverly pointed out.

“You think he might get a taste for it?” Jack asked.

“Might like the rush, might like the money that comes from this. Might wanna see what more... *vital* organs gets him.” Beverly said, a dangerous glint in her eyes.

“You’ll catch the Ripper, Jack. Eventually.” Will assured.

“Yeah, well, I want to catch him now. And when I do, you’re not gonna get a chance to shoot him, ‘cause I’m gonna do that.”

Ice cold panic shot through Will. He had no idea why, it wasn’t anyone's. It was his own, a horrible fear. Subconsciously, what Jack said scared him.

Why ?

“You can’t just jack up the law and get underneath it.” Will said eyebrows drawn tight. Beverly and him took a step back, together.

“Can’t I?”

“Jack, just because we’re FBI that doesn’t give us the right to become… vigilantes.” Brian spoke out. “You know that right.”

“Right. Of course.” Jack sighed. “Tell me how you see the Ripper, Will.”

Will took a breath, Beverly stepping back and letting him stand alone. He closed his eyes, conjuring in his head a gallery of the Ripper’s kills. A blank portrait painted Miriam lass and the skulls of undiscovered victims crunched loudly under his feet. A shadow of the Ripper sat in the throne at the head of it all, a long table set in front of him with organs laid out like a feast.

“I see him, as one of those pitiful things sometimes born in hospitals. They feed it, keep it warm- but they don’t put it on the machines.” The shadow grew, thin bony arms accentuated with claws and antlers growing out slowly from it's head. “They let it die. But he doesn’t die. He looks normal.” The shape of ribs, the thing emaciated from too many missed meals as a child. “And nobody can tell what he is.” It turned to him, face all too familiar with Maroon eyes staring back.

—

Hannibal took a breath, closing his sketchbook of Will and putting it in the drawer to the right of his desk, locking it. He stared at the drawer, where he kept so many of his secrets, and pondered what he should do if Will should ever question him on what was in there.

The wisest thing would be to keep a regular Will sketchbook in there on top of the other one, but that may come off as too obsessive. Expensive wines would do the trick, but they wouldn’t hide what was underneath. The wound man drawing, that tipped Miriam Lass off to his identity lay at the bottom of that drawer. Drawings of Mischa and his childhood home came next, and then the more… revealing drawings of his partner.

He hung the key in its place in his wine cabinet, checking the clock to see it had just turned 5:00. He sighed, bracing himself and opening the door to his office.

“Good morning. Please come in.” Franklyn smiled and stood, walking past Hannibal into his office. The usual near revolting stench of cheese wafted in intensely after him, along with too much cologne. He wrinkled his nose briefly, the expression vanishing before it even really had a chance to form. If there was anything he regretted of his experience with Will the night before, it was subjecting the perfect profiler to Franklyn’s stench.

He sat down across from him, in his usual chair, and looked across at him. Hannibal considered perhaps getting a new one, one he’d have uniquely for Will. One they could have all sorts of fun with and not have to worry about stains or smells…

He noticed Franklyn getting fidgety, and spoke to break the silence. “Would you like to discuss our chance encounter?”

The man chuckled, the pungent smell of sweat adding to the altogether repulsive aroma. “It wasn’t altogether by chance.... I kinda, kinda thought you’d be there.” Franklyn stuttered a

bit. “Which wasn’t why I-I I was there, I was there because I like that sort of thing. Uh, it just occurred to me that… that you might like it too.”

Hannibal blinked, annoyance bubbling to the surface. Normally having a stalker patient ensured that he wasn’t the stalkee, and usually he had fun manipulating them and pushing them too far. With Franklyn however, the only people he could push him to hurt were people he quite cared about. The man was dreadfully boring. “In fact, I do.”

“I tried to get your attention-”

“I was aware of that.” Hannibal concealed everything neatly.

“I knew that you were aware. Even though you were pretending that you weren’t.” An unstable tilt came in his voice. The man was overly attached.

“It would be unethical to approach a patient or acknowledge in any way our relationship outside this room until that patient gives consent.”

“But I really don’t know who you are outside this room. I didn’t know your friend, or that you know people in the FBI.”

“I’m your psychiatrist.” Hannibal gave a blank answer. Franklyn was treading dangerously.

“I want you to be my friend.” He smiled pleadingly.

“Of course you do. I have intimate knowledge of you.” Hannibal deflected.

“And we like the same things! I think we would make good friends, all four of us! It makes me sad, that I have to pay to see you.”

Rude . Hannibal had been trying his hardest to deflect him nicely, but he was getting a referral. Or faked suicide. And to even insinuate that he could have nearly the potential to be in the elite few of Will’s friends. Franklyn wasn’t even 'stupid charming' like Price and Zeller were. “I am a source of stability and clarity, Franklin. I am not your friend.”

“I’m a great friend.”

Hannibal took a deep breath and prepared to endure this argument until he could find a way to cleanly dispose of him.

—

Will smiled and waited just outside Hannibal’s door to his office, the Doctor usually opening up and checking for him immediately after the previous patient instead of taking a break. He had worked hard and made Hannibal a present- a little fish shaped lure in a suit with a chefs hat. He wouldn’t be able to buy anything for him really, so he had tried to make something.

He heard Hannibal move towards the door, tensing up right before the door opened. “Good evening, Will.”

Will smiled, leaning up to greet him with a hug. “Good evening, Hannibal.” Hannibal’s mood immediately skyrocketed, filling the room with a warm and soft feeling. He was safe here.

As soon as they pulled back from the hug Hannibal looked concerned. “Your eye bags are back.”

“Jack called me in for a ‘Ripper emergency’ at like, midnight last night.” Will did air quotes as he took off and hung up his jacket, getting the little present out.

“I saw the Freddie Lounds article. The Ripper Ripped again.”

“Nah. Medical student screwed up a back alley surgery. Took the kidney and ran. Still at large.” Will glanced at the wine, brows furrowing. “Oh, you’ve been drinking.”

“I had a glass of wine with my last appointment, yes.”

“Drinking with a patient?” Will asked, turning the small box over in his heads, kept facing away from the Doctor.

“Ah, *she* was drinking with a patient. I have an unconventional psychiatrist.”

Will giggled, “Me too.”

“Am I your psychiatrist, or am I something more than a friend?” Hannibal asked, tone suddenly serious.

Will flushed, turning to him. “I-I, uhm.” *Words, Graham.* “That was a joke, I don’t exactly know the words for what we are-”

“Together?” Hannibal proposed, taking both his hands. Will brought his eyes up to meet the Doctor’s, smiling timidly.

“Yes, I think, is the answer to that.” He said, seeing down to the darkness and the beast behind the person suit. It grew less scary to him every day. Hannibal was so very lonely, like Will, and they were both alone without each other. “How long have you been seeing a psychiatrist?” Will asked, breaking eye contact.

Hannibal was positively glowing- Will was sure he might be able to get everything out of him if he asked. But startling a predator ended you up with being gutted by it's claws.

“Since I chose to be a psychiatrist.” Came the simple answer. Hannibal walked over to the wine cabinet, Will noticed an odd key hanging off a hook inside. He grabbed another glass, and then poured Will some wine.

Will took it, saying his thanks before taking a sip. “Never had pink wine.” He said as he sat down, turning the box over in his hands.

Hannibal glanced down at it, before taking his own seat across. “They tend to be fruity or savoury, and are often described as manly.”

Will laughed. “It's wine.” He noticed Hannibal glance down again, trying to be discreet. Will didn’t know why he was nervous. He could give Hannibal a worm because he thought it was neat and Hannibal would probably make a whole worm farm from that one worm and create some profound reason behind it to justify it. “I, uh, you’ve been really good to me. For you know, the past month or so, and I wanted to make you something…” as expected, adoration and excitement and pure joy overwhelmed the room, Hannibal even displaying a small smile.

While Will knew objectively most would consider having a relationship with an obsessive psychopath was not a good thing, he couldn’t deny that this was the happiest he had ever been in a relationship. Hannibal actually made him feel valued. Will held the box out, it being taken gingerly from his hand by Hannibal, who unwrapped it like it was the most precious thing he had ever held. He did have a real smile, and slowly, wasn’t hiding his expressions so tightly around Will anymore. Slowly Will was coaxing the monster out of the cage, to come and play with no masks.

It would still be a ways more to go.

“It's wonderful. Thank you.” Hannibal spoke earnestly, taking the lure, still in the box, and placing it on his desk for safekeeping. “Are you doing anything in particular tonight Will?”

“Well, I was kinda hoping that my hot boyfriend would invite me over for dinner.”

“Ah, shame, I fancied you.” Will laughed at the quip, enjoying the easy air of the room.

“Mmm, what are we having?” Will asked, glancing up at Hannibal as he came to stand behind his chair.

Will was suddenly acutely aware of Hannibal’s eyes raking over his exposed collarbone and the expanse of his neck, unprotected by hairs as he had been so inclined to shave.

“Honey-glazed elk with a light salad topped with Parmesan and filled with oats.”

Will swallowed, “Sounds great.”

___

Will helped chop up the vegetables and grate the cheese, watching as Hannibal artfully arranged everything and lead him out to eat.

“Misses Komeda is right. It is an entire performance.”

Hannibal smiled setting the plates down and pulling out Will’s chair for him. “I do think it is coming time to throw another feast.” He said, leaning in a bit as if it was a secret.

“Ooh, fancy. Let me know if you trust me to help with anything.”

Hannibal took his own seat after he served the wine. “I trust you to help with everything if you so wish. Or simply sit with me while I prepare, after all, Misses Komeda also pointed out that you are a lovely muse.”

Will blushed, rolling his eyes fondly as he took a sip of his drink.

“How do you know that the most recent murder wasn’t committed by the Chesapeake Ripper.” Will snapped out of his lovesticken haze, wondering If Hannibal knew what proper dinner conversations were.

Will shook his head, attributing it to being one of his many quirks. “The Ripper makes art. He paints a deliberate canvas, fills it with meaning and metaphor. This was like an urban legend come to life. It wasn’t even Gideon close to the Ripper’s work.”

“What was close?”

“The careful removal and conservation of vital organs.”

"Valuable organs." Will cocked his head.

“Organ harvesters? You think the Ripper is an organ harvester too?”

“Jack’s looking for a serial killer he can’t seem to catch. It's a brilliant diversion.”

“That's an interesting theory. I will keep it in mind if another body drops.” Will said shakily, taking another sip of his wine. He was agitated, Hannibal had been so open earlier and now Will couldn’t even tell if he liked the food he was serving.

“Please do.” He smelled each bite before he ate it, an interesting quirk Will filed away for later.

What couldn’t he see?

—

Hannibal smiled as he watched Will yawn, the sleeping pills he put yet again in Will’s wine working their magic. If he just slept more, he wouldn’t have to resort to this, but Will seemed to do nothing but neglect himself.

“You seem exhausted.”

“Long day.”

Hannibal rubbed his arm, watching Will watch the fire with half open eyes. Leaning against the desk in his study, with his flannel rolled up to his elbows and another glass of wine in his hand, it felt domestic. He could picture Abigail upstairs, studying, Will's zoo running about and making things lively.

Someone they picked out together strung up in the basement, ready to be harvested and displayed.

Each crime scene a love note, to his beautiful Will. He raised his hand up to stroke his hair, bringing him in to lean on his chest. "Stay?" He asked, pressing his lips chastley to Will's forehead.

"Mm, 'course." He muttered sleepily leaning further in. "Don't gotta worry about the dogs, I installed a door for them. They're free to come and go as they please and they all have food till tomorrow. Winston's good for tonight, right?"

"Of course, come, let's to bed." Will trailed after him, sleep heavy in his eyes, and they made their way upstairs. As he reached into his drawer to pull out spare clothes Will leaned up, kissing him deeply. He sleepily pawed at his shoulders, bringing their mouths together repeatedly. Hannibal tangled his fingers in Will's hair, the other hand going around Will's waist to hold him up to get a better angle. He pushed forwards, walking Will back to the bed and falling with him onto it.

Will reached up, undoing the buttons on his shirt one by one and trying to push it off his shoulders, breaking the kiss to let out a loud yawn.

Hannibal laughed, taking Will's hands and pinning them above his head. "Perhaps when you are not so tired, yes?"

Will mumbled out some sort of protest, before his eyes drifted shut and he started to snore softly.

Hannibal sighed, ignoring the discomfort in his pants as he changed Will into nightclothes and tucked him in. He would have gone out straight after that, but Will in his bed for the first time was too good a sight to resist. Hannibal got his sketchbook, and began to draw.

___

Will awoke in the most comfortable bed he had ever been in, very well rested and in oddly comfortable pajamas. Hannibal was already awake, staring down at him tenderly for who knows how long. Fingers were combing through his hair, and he was resting under one of Hannibal's arms, the man having a very comfortable shoulder.

"Good Morning, Dear Will."

"'Mornin' Hannibal." He slurred back sleepily, nearly falling back down into slumber.

Hannibal turned, rolling on top of Will. He kissed him tenderly, and Will found himself waking up as he wrapped his arms around the back of Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal reached down, and Will flushed as he felt fingers undoing the buttons of the silk nightshirt he definitely *wasn't* wearing when he passed out. Will scooted a bit closer, adjusting so Hannibal could rest comfortably between his legs-

Will's phone began ringing loudly from the bedside table, and Hannibal cursed under his breath and glared at it, Will's eyes going wide with shock.

"I didn't know you spoke that kind of language, Doctor." Will teased, trying to nose him back into kissing. The irritation was a bit stronger than usual, some of it directed inward. Will furrowed his brow in concern.

"I don't have to answer it, we can just… stay here all day if you want." The phone stopped, and Hannibal opened his mouth to answer when it went off again. Will, reached over to turn off his phone, but Hannibal stopped his hands.

"You should see what Jack wants."

Will sneered a bit in agitation, but answered.

"It's the Ripper."

"Are you serious Jack? Again? This kid is not the Ripper." Will asked, throwing an arm over his eyes.

"I am very serious."

Will sighed, hanging up the phone. "It's the Ripper again," he said, tossing it to the side. "I'm not going in. This is probably the third red herring-" Will's phone went off with several texts. He sighed, opening his phone and checking them.

He went cold. This was the Rippers work. He could feel it in every stroke of the blade. "Will? Are you alright?"

He cleared his throat. "It's the Ripper."

"You can tell by pictures?"

"He has a style. This fits the style. I'm sorry, I have to go."

Hannibal nodded, giving him a peck on the forehead. "Stay safe."

—

Will was shaking as he held his dog in his car, Winston whining and licking his face. Brian came by, quietly.

“So it is the Ripper?”

“This one is, the other one? No. He… he was impatient with this. Wanted something clean and simple. Thought it wouldn’t be discovered for a while. He was *busy* .” Will wondered what he was busy with. It felt like he knew, this scene was the most intense he had ever felt. It felt intimate. Not the crime, but seeing the Ripper himself. Like an old friend.

“He took the kidney and the heart, like he was trying to do in the hotel room, but was interrupted.”

“No, the Ripper didn’t paint that picture someone else did.” Will insisted, growing agitated.

“You still think he was ripping out a heart to save a life?”

“Yes! I do!” Will shouted, loud enough that Jack and Beverly came over to see what was going on. Will’s head was pounding.

'See?'

“Hey, what’s going on here?”

Brian backed off. “I just think the Ripper killed the guy in the hotel.”

“Will?”

“That's *wrong,* this is all *wrong-”* Will grasped his hands in his hair, letting out a sob. Beverly pulled him into her chest, gently shushing him.

“Jack, I don’t think it would be smart to let Will into any more fresh Ripper scenes. Not with this reaction.”

“Depends on the scene.” Jack said, turning and walking away to watch the body be readied for transport.

Beverly rocked him gently, shushing him quietly. Will hid his face away on her chest, not wanting to say what was really horrifying him. The Ripper was too familiar- it was someone he knew. He had met them, *knew them,* and he without even slipping into any other mindset he saw it as it was meant to be seen- as art. He elevated that man into art. Will *agreed* with his mindset. He admired it.

Talking about it to Jack would just make him slip up and wind up incarcerated.

___

They stood around the body, and Will was the first to speak,

“Could the organs have be harvested for transplant?”

“Subtle variation on waking up in a tub of ice missing a kidney?” Beverly asked, looking around.

“Oooh, I love a good urban legend!” Jimmy smiled, whole face lighting up with joy. “You could put the organs on a ventilator long enough to coordinate the donation!”

“At the hotel the victims abdominal aorta and inferior vena cava-” Brian paused to explain briefly, “That's like the kidney’s in-and-out for blood- were entirely removed.”

“They’re like USB cables, keep them intact for easy reconnect.”

“Were Mr.Caldwell’s heart and kidney disconnected for an easy reconnect?” Will asked, looking around.

“Yeah.” Brian confirmed, smiling,

“Other Ripper victims- organs and USB cables missing?”

“Inconclusive due to the degree of mutilation but, yes, that is how the Ripper rips.” Brian smiled. “Did we just solve the ‘what does the Ripper do with his meat’ question?”

Will heart dropped to his stomach. The trainee, yes that was what they were doing. But the Ripper…

The Ripper was *eating* them. That was what the Ripper did with his meat.

“Two different killers, same agenda?” Beverly asked.

“Different levels of skills too. The Ripper is a trained medical professional- the other one is just a trainee.”

“Is the organ harvester disguising his work as that of a serial killer or a serial killer disguising his work as that of an organ harvester?”

“One of each.” Will answered. “The Chesapeake Ripper wants to perform. Every brutal choice had elegance, grace.” Will voice trembled, trying to keep his admiration and awe out of his tone. “His mutilations hide the true nature of his crimes.” Now that he had finally seen his work in person, Will was quickly finding even more ways to appreciate his art.

He’d never let that secret see the light of day.

___

Will went to a store in Baltimore before he went to Hannibal's house, trying to find a nice wine to give to him. If tonight was going how he thought it would, he wanted to do something special. He was dressed nice, blue button down and slacks, and he scratched at his chin as he looked at the wall of wine.

"Will Graham?"

Will braced himself, turning and seeing the short, round man that had introduced himself has Hannibal's patient at the last opera performance.

"Hello again, I'm sorry, terrible with names." Will held out his hand.

"Franklyn. So, how do you and Doctor Lecter know each other?" He asked, not trying to beat around the bush.

"He gave me a psych eval after I shot a man ten times." Will gave a deadpan answer, not really caring to not freak out the man. He was just stressful for Hannibal to deal with.

"Oh!" Franklyn's eyes shot up, not expecting an answer like that. It was silent for a moment, before he continued. "I read about you on tattle-crime, the tabloid website?"

"I am aware of it."

"I didn't know you also killed someone, does he have alot of ex-patient friends?"

"Nope. Just me." Will said looking back at the wines.

Worry flooded the air around Franklyn, and Will turned back to him. "Are you *blackmailing* Doctor Lecter into being your friend?" the man nearly shrieked, causing people to look at them.

"No, and he's my partner, not just my friend. Fuck off, please." Will said, and he turned on his heel to walk back to his car, deciding that Hannibal would find his company good enough.

He heard footsteps follow him and he got into the front seat of his car, starting the engine. Phantom and Winston gave happy barks from the back, and Franklyn paled when he saw Phantom stick his head out the window. Will laughed as he drove away, still giggling as he rolled down the back windows further for the dogs.

—

Will rang the doorbell to Hannibal's home, noticing the hybrid parked in front. Alana was here. He frowned a bit, and then smiled as Hannibal opened the door.

"Good evening Will."

"Hello, Doctor Lecter. I'm sorry for my sudden departure yesterday morning, the team really needed me." Will wasn't sure where the sudden and desperate need to apologize for any tiny

thing came from, but probably from the extreme irritation and anger rolling off Hannibal in waves.

He smiled, tight lipped and slightly predatory, before stepping aside to allow Will to come in. “Not at all, Alana is here, helping and being my sues chef as well.” Will should have bought the wine.

“Hello Will!” There was a bright flush on her cheeks and she held a beer in her hand.

“Good evening Alana.” Phantom barked hello, Winston wagging his tail.

“You brought Phantom!” Alana said, leaning down to pat the dog.

“Will is my friend, he should never be denied any comfort in my home.” Hannibal said, a smug feeling overriding everything else as he got a bowl of scraps from his fridge, all cooked just enough to not be dangerous for the dogs. “For your friends.”

Will gave him a wide smile, improving his mood that much more. “Thank you!”

“You have to have some of this beer- Hannibal bottled it himself!” Alana exclaimed happily, and Hannibal got out a fancy looking bottle.

“Really? I wouldn’t be surprised if you made your own wine as well.” Hannibal chuckled, filling out a glass for him and handing it over.

“I’m afraid that takes more skill than I have.”

“Mmm, I think we just have the wrong weather for grapes.” Will joked, getting a good laugh from them as he took a sip. “This is amazing.”

“Brewed for two years in a Cabernet Sauvignon barrel.” She smiled proudly.

“Alana has a very sharp pallette. I brewed this batch just for her.” Will felt jealousy shoot cold through his stomach.

“It's good.” Will commented, trying not to look too put off. When he did think about it, Alana was a better match for Hannibal. The only thing she lacked was the more flexible set of morals, but Will had a feeling Hannibal knew how to reshape those quite easily.

Will refused any more glasses of alcohol that night, heading home before desert.

Hannibal’s mood seemed to only worsen.

___

Will gazed at the row of bodies, easily seeing which were the Ripper and which were the harvester. Jimmy was talking to him about what they found- *the Ripper probably **was** making sausage, Will felt sick*- feeling distracted.

“How many killers.”

“Two.” Will answered confidently. He didn’t want to be looking at this stuff with his feelings about Alana and Hannibal stirring in the forefront of his mind. His nightmares had been pleasant to him- that made them all the worse.

“One of them is the Ripper?”

“Yes.”

Will looked down, and the body closest to him had Alana’s face.

___

Hannibal was angry. The night before was going to be *perfect.* He had set up the lights, candles, a special room made for the dogs when Will slept over. He had a romantic bath prepared, and then Alana showed up. This would have been fine, normally.

When their subject matter turned to Will, things went downhill.

“Do you think he’s stable enough for a relationship? I’ve held off, because I wasn’t sure if I was what he needed, but now he’s got you to lean on…”

Luckily, Will come to the door at that moment, but had obviously picked up on his anger and misinterpreted it and ran. Not before Alana had a chance to flirt with him all night however. If Will figured out what he was too soon, he'd loose him to Alana. Thing after thing was just getting in the way. Still, he only needed to be patient before he could have Will completely. Perhaps the morning after the feast, after Will had time to decompress and to ensure he wouldn’t be overstimulated by too many things.

He looked up, seeing that it was 5:00, before heaving a deep sigh and opening the door for Franklyn. “Please come in.”

“I discovered that we are cheese folk.” Hannibal already wanted to be over with this session. He had no clue what that meant, he would have liked to have Will here to translate exactly what Franklyn was saying. “I saw you shopping for cheese.” *Excuse me?* “I didn’t say hello, because you were so uncomfortable the last time I did.”

“This city is very small.” He remarked, considering how easy it would be to fake this patients suicide.

“Yes.” Franklyn lightly tapped his knee and Hannibal made a mental not to burn the pants he was wearing. “José’s, José’s has the best selection of artisanal cheeses in Baltimore, city or county.” He laughed a bit. “Cheese is my passion.” Hannibal could smell it on him. “You ever heard of tyromancy?”

“Divination by cheese?” It was moronic.

“It was my gateway to cheeses!” Franklyn leaned further over in his chair. Hannibal made another mental note to move the chairs as far away apart as possible for his appointment. “It was like a Magic 8 ball that you can eat.” He stopped for a moment. “Tobias, he uhm. He doesn’t eat dairy.” He looked kind of sad. Hannibal felt like playing with him.

“Do you desire Tobias sexually?”

“No, god, no. Uh, no. Not to be defensive. I just, um… I mean, don’t get me wrong I was in a ‘fraternity’, I tried things, you know? I, uhm. I saw Will Graham in the same store.”

Hannibal showed no outward emotion, but now he was livid. “Did you?”

“He said… He said that you two met because he shot a man ten times and you gave his psych eval.”

“It's a longer story than that- that makes him seem like some sort of psychopath.”

“He also said that the two of you were romantically involved.”

Hannibal’s eyes flashed dangerously. “And if we are?”

“He implied that he was blackmailing you into it, I’m just worried about you, do you need help or-”

Did he? “Will’s relationship with me is none of your concern, Franklyn.”

“I know, but, blink twice if you need me to call the police.”

Hannibal glared harshly. “*Franklyn-* ”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’ll talk about me now.”

—

Hannibal swung open the door with joy and excitement, and, upon finding it empty, reprimanded himself harshly for behaving like a dog awaiting it's master. Will had charmed him into being one of his pack, and now he was behaving it too. Will still had ten minutes before his appointment time.

The clock just turned 7:30 when Hannibal sat in the driver's seat of his bentley.

___

Will was in the fields, Cassie Boyle set out like a table. Abigail sat beside him, across from him the stag man he knew as the Ripper.

“It's better when it's just us.” Abigail spoke, smiling. Her neck was bare of a scar.

“Will?” The stag man spoke.

“Dad?”

“Yes?” Will answered, feeling like he was in a dream.

“Will?” Will opened his eyes, seeing he was in his classroom. “Will?” Will turned seeing Hannibal. Concern and worry, anxiousness. “I have a twenty-four hour cancellation policy.

Will blinked the sleep from his eyes, confusion apparent on his face. “What… What time is it?”

“Nearly nine o’clock.” Hannibal walked over, checking his temperature.

“Oh, I’m sorry-”

“No apology necessary.” Hannibal assured him.

“I must have fallen asleep. Was I sleepwalking?” Will asked, leaning heavily into the touch as Hannibal began to stroke his hair.

“Your eyes were open, but you were not present.”

Will sighed, rubbing his eyes. “I felt like I was asleep. Maybe I should just, stop sleeping all together. Best way to avoid bad dreams.”

“You don’t seem as plagued by the nightmares when you are with me.”

Will smiled up at him, his mind open and raw. “Just what are you insinuating Doctor Lecter?”

Hannibal smiled. “Nothing quite yet. Simply stating the facts.” He glanced over the table. “I can see why you have bad dreams.” He looked over photo’s of the Ripper, smiling proudly. Will felt his heart stop. The smile was gone before he fully turned to him- Will tried passed it off as a trick of the light.

“What do you see, Doctor?” Will asked, anxiety held tight in his chest. He stood up, facing Hannibal fully.

“Sum up the Ripper in so many words?” Hannibal’s eyes grew sharp, pointed. He knew exactly what Will was worrying, what he was insinuating. Or it seemed that way to Will.

“Choose them wisely.”

“Oh, I always do.” Hannibal looked over the gory pictures, moving some to get a better look at others. “Words are living things, they have personality, point of view, agenda.”

“They’re pack hunters.” Will looked up, hoping to get his message across. It was a proposal- an invitation. Hannibal didn’t look back.

“Displaying one’s enemy after death has its appeal in many cultures.” Hannibal spoke, and Will let out a breath.

“These aren’t the Ripper’s enemies,” He corrected, relieved, “These are pests he’s swatted.”

“The reward for their cruelty.” Hannibal stated, tilting his head.

“He doesn’t have a problem with cruelty. He’s no vigilante. Not by our standards. Their reward is for undignified behavior, rudeness. These dissections are too disgrace them, what they were in life. It's a public shaming.”

“He takes their organs away because in his mind they don’t deserve them.” Will nodded, moving away from the table.

“In some way.” He watched as Hannibal picked out the photo of Miriam’s arm, seemingly out of nowhere. Will's worry came back.

“Who’s this?”

“Miriam Lass. Jack Crawford’s trainee. She’s not like the other victims- the Ripper had no reason to humiliate her, she was smart enough to find him.”

“Seems to me he was humiliating someone.”

Will nodded. “Jack thought Gideon was the Ripper, he was humiliating Jack.”

Hannibal considered his words for a moment. “Did it work?”

“I’d say it worked really well.” Will said, staring intently at Hannibal. Was his luck really that bad?

“Will!” Jack barked, storming into his lecture hall. Winston barked back, from somewhere up in the seats. “There you are.”

Will whistled once, patting the side of his leg and Winston came running, waiting for his leash to be grabbed. “And Doctor Lecter, what a surprise. We have a lead.” Jack was apprehensive with Hannibal there. Hannibal might make Will stay behind on the case. “Would you care to uh, help us catch the Ripper?”

Beverly smiled, winking when Jack turned away and giving a thumbs up. Will flushed, and Jack turned just in time to see her put her hands behind her back and look away.

“How could I refuse?”

___

They arrived at the warehouse, Will listened as they were told about the condition of the ambulance. Down for repairs was smart, gave them free range off the radar and nobody's name attached. The man who signed the car in was taking the MCATs.

Gotcha.

And the ambulance was gone. Will sighed.

“Is there GPS on that ambulance?” Beverly was a quick thinker- Will wondered why he was even needed when they had her.

“Jack, if the ambulance radio is on I can use a DF sweep to find it.”

“Good.”

“This is all very educational.” Hannibal remarked. Will smiled.

Will gave Bev a high five as they got back in the car, Winston waiting happily.

___

The SWAT team encircled the abulance, Beverly having found it pretty easily. Hannibal and Will stayed behind with Winston, watching as they went ahead.

“She saved my life with that gun.” Will remarked, watching her advance on the vehicle. “She has incredible aim, it's insane.”

“Really?”

“Shot a woman through the shoulder, incapacitating her while freeing the boy she was holding hostage in her arms. She was a good thirty yards away.”

“With a handgun?”

“I know, right?” He smiled.

“Doctor Lecter!” Jack shouted, gun trained on whoever was inside the vehicle. Will and Hannibal ran to the car, looking inside. “I need you to assess the situation here, Doctor.” Hannibal hopped into the back of the ambulance, and Will watched him. “He was removing his kidney. Poorly. I can stop the bleeding.”

“Do it.” Jack gave the go ahead, and Will watched as Hannibal took over the surgery from the young man.

He was arrested, and Will watched Hannibal work, barley hiding the arousal coiling in his gut as he watched him hold a man's life in his hands.

___

Will actually brought a bottle of wine this time, and took a breath before exiting his car. He looked around, having had to park a little ways away as the street was unusually full. He spotted Alana’s car, not too far away. He sighed. This was probably to be another repeat. Only one glass then.

Only the door was answered by hired help, and there were so many people there. In… really fancy outfits. Will flinched as he remembered how he looked, covered in dog hair with both of his hounds slobbering at his sides. The help offered to take his dogs to their room, as they were probably warned of his presence with them beforehand, and he agreed, handing over their leashes.

He wouldn’t be here that long anyway.

He managed to navigate to the kitchen, avoiding any possible conversations, and smiled when Hannibal turned to greet him.

“I can’t really stay that long tonight, Sorry.” He said, keeping his eyes to the ground. “I have plans.”

Hannibal kept cooking, frowning slightly. “I see. At least you might be able to stay around for a bit? I was hoping to show you off to the friends of mine you haven’t met at the opera.

“I hardly think I’m dressed for the occasion.” Will stared at the odd red liquid Hannibal was working with, a question obvious in his eyes.

“I have a butcher who carries sow’s blood. Centrifugate, separate the matter from the water, and it creates a transparent liquid. Serve with tomatoes in suspension and everybody will love the sweet taste.” Will hummed, eyeing the liquid and wondering the partial truth of what he was saying. “I have clothes upstairs that you may be more comfortable in, are you sure you can’t stay?”

“Ah, I don’t think I would be good company.”

“I disagree.” Hannibal said, more frustration barely escaping his mask and staining the air around him red. Will almost reconsidered his words, but he wanted to know for certain before anything else progressed between them. “But before you go, what became of Mr. Sylvestri’s donor?”

“You saved his life.” Will stated. Hannibal paused.

“It’s been a long time since I used a scalpel on anything but a pencil.” *Lies.*

“Why’d you stop being a surgeon?” *It was too obvious.*

“I killed someone- or, more accurately, I couldn’t save someone, but it felt like killing them.”

The first part of that statement was more accurate. “You were an emergency room surgeon. It has to happen from time to time.”

“It happened one time too many. I transferred my passion for anatomy into the culinary arts-” Will felt sick again “- I fix minds instead of bodies, and no one’s died as a result of my therapy.”

Will chuckled a bit. “I have to go.” He stepped forward, and paused. Open and willing adoration, he wasn’t sure why, but Hannibal was staring at him with the most lovesick expression he had ever seen.

“I’m sure one night off after catching a killer is warranted. Your friends from the team are here.” Will debated in his mind. He had already made his choice.

He sighed. “Where is the change of clothes?”

“Upstairs, laid out on my bed. I’ll come collect you when I have finished cooking.” Will nodded, setting the bottle of wine down and turning away. “Will?”

“What is it?” He turned back, meeting his gaze.

“I am very glad you decided to stay.”

Will smiled, exiting the kitchen and making a mad dash for the stairs.

He didn’t make it far.

“Will?” Alana Bloom caught his arm. “What a pleasant surprise. I thought you’d haul yourself up with your dogs instead of coming.”

“It was a last second decision, Hannibal said he had spare clothes that would make me look less of a wild lumberjack upstairs.”

“Aww, but I love your disheveled bigfoot look.” Beverly came up behind him, throwing a lose arm over his shoulder. She was dressed in dazzling red, and she stood out greatly among the others. “I’m hoping to find some rich lady looking for a pretty little thing to take care of.” She joked, snickering.

“Good luck. I doubt it.” Will noticed an immediate souring of Alana’s mood.

“If it happened to you it can happen to me.” Will nearly choked on his own spit. “Jimmy and Brian have been making passes at each other for the past ten minutes, but they’ve been misinterpreting them. It's horrible to watch.” She sipped her glass of fancy liquid, Will couldn’t tell what it was, and motioned over to them.

“Did they… both just try to pull the yawn-and-put-arm-around thing at the same time?”

“I know.” Beverly shook her head. “Anyway, let's get you dressed.” She pushed him towards the staircase, ushering him up and waving goodbye. Alana looked very distressed, and Will wondered what went wrong with her and Beverly as she turned and stormed off from the brunette without a word.

___

Will didn’t have to wait long after dressing, Hannibal appearing in the doorway after knocking and coming to give him a proper kiss hello.

“You look magnificent.”

“I’ve been told I clean up quite nice.”

“I think you looked lovely even when I first saw you in Jack’s office.” Will laughed.

“Oh yeah, I bet I looked real nice on 1 hour of sleep a week and a diet exclusively of cup a noodles, dog food, and instant coffee.”

The horror that encased Hannibal’s expression lasted for a solid minute while Will had a laughing fit. “I will always be grateful that you ended up under my care." Hannibal said, shaking his head. Will took his arm, smiling up at him.

“Jack isn’t here tonight, I know he’s working on the Ripper case still. Parade me around all you like.”

Hannibal happily tugged him a little bit closer. “Alana is here tonight however.”

Will’s smile wobbled. “I know, she was talking to me before I came up here.”

Hannibal’s happy mood vanished, going back into a blank wall. “What did she say, exactly?”

“Not much, Beverly interrupted and pointed out that Jimmy and Brian were being stupid and then hurried me upstairs.”

“Your little group is very charming.” Hannibal smiled, easy demeanor back. Will almost pulled his hand away, but Hannibal simply grasped him tighter and began to lead him downstairs.

___

Will sat to Hannibal's right, looking across at Alana. Beverly was right next to him, and he saw Misses Komeda by Alana. He recognized vaguely some other faces and Jimmy and Brian, but the rest were mystery.

“Before we begin, you must all be warned: Nothing here is vegetarian.”

As everyone else laughed Will smiled, feeling faintly sick as he saw raw hearts and livers spread out over the table instead of the actual feast, human remains and gore dug into like starving animals.

When he looked back to Hannibal, he saw the shadow of the wendigo.

Chapter End Notes

Ruh-roh

I had planned for him to figure it out a couple chapters later, but like, it just didn't make sense for him not to get it now.

Thanks for reading, my favorite episode of season one is up next!

An issue was brought up last time, if anyone does want to use any of my OC's (dog or cat) please just ask me beforehand and credit me!
This includes Rover, Phantom, Allie, Maroomba, Cecelia, Scarlet, Pastel, Salem, Wolf, Whiskey, Gremlin, and Ripper and a couple others later.

Fromage

Chapter Summary

Franklyn has a very bad week.

Chapter Notes

This is my favorite episode of season 1 lmao.

There is SMUT IN THIS CHAPTER! I've only ever written smut once before and I was fifteen at the time so it has been many years.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will ducked out shortly after dinner, saying he had to be in early for work tomorrow and he needed sleep. Hannibal seemed glad that he was taking care of himself, but undeniably disappointed. That was fine.

Will needed to know if he was right about things.

About Hannibal Lecter being the Chesapeake Ripper. About the meals in his fridge that he dared not to touch now. About what was most certainly his fate if he ever let it slip that he had figured it out.

Will awoke early the next morning with nothing to do in the day, Jack having actually given him the day off for ‘rest’. Will decided he would spend it working on boat motors, the things actually following a set of rules and easily fixed once you knew what the problem was.

Unlike his life.

In a week he and Hannibal would be taking Ripper to get his cast off. Will looked at the cat, seeing the reason behind the lovingly bestowed nickname. Everything Hannibal did was like some fucked up joke.

Will heard noise then, faintly from outside. Whimpering and crying- did one of his dogs get out?

He looked around, seeing everyone accounted for. Will went back to working.

He heard more noise. Will got up, looking outside. There was something out there.

Will quickly threw on his coat and wandered out into the snow, foolishly looking for something he knew he would never find.

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Will decided to call Alana, needing someone who had experience with people off their rocker who didn't also happen to be the Ripper or his boyfriend. She met him out in the fields, wading through the underbrush with a concerned look on her face.

"If it wasn't a coyote, the coyotes probably got it. Probably got it even if it was a coyote."

Alana reached him then, and he continued walking with her by his side. "You're not expecting to find it alive, are you?"

"We'll be lucky to find a paw."

Alana gave him a look. "So, you invited me over to help you collect animals parts?" Will could feel her confusion, and for once her presence wasn't as suffocating as it normally was.

"I invited you over on the off chance we do find it alive, It's hard for me to wrangle a wounded animal by myself. Beverly and the rest of the team are working on the Ripper case and gave me a mandatory day off, so you were the only person available."

Alana's mood immediately soured at the mention of Beverly. "So I was your backup for your date?"

Will gave her a surprised look. "My date?"

"I've seen how you and Beverly are." Will stopped and actually looked her in the eye.

"Beverly? Alana, no. She's my best friend, but I'm afraid I don't have the right parts for her proclivities."

She blushed, looking to the side. "Oh. I was wondering, you know. You don't seem like you date but Jack was saying you were… friendly with her."

"What, I'm 'too broken to date'?" He asked, mockingly placing a hand over his heart. He laughed a bit, and she chuckled too.

"You're not broken." She said, smiling at him. He felt a pang of loss for what might've happened, should things have been a little different. "Hannibal's been good for you?"

"Very." He said, managing to keep the sarcasm out of his tone. "I've been eating good, sleeping good. Learning to say no to Jack." He took a breath. "I'm thinking about quitting the teaching. Putting one foot firmly in a different path. An animal shelter, or working as a mechanic in a boat yard-"

“I think you should. I think the more distance you have away from that stuff the better you’ll be.”

Will laughed, starting up the walk again. “I’m afraid if I do, I won’t want to go back to that stuff at all.”

“Would that be so bad? You’ve saved enough people Will. You can focus on yourself.”

“Not now. The Ripper just finished another cycle and Jack needs my support.” Will protested, walking up ahead a bit.

“After the Ripper is caught,” Alana started, touching his arm lightly. “Promise you’ll stop?”

Will nodded. “Sure.”

He wouldn’t let that happen. He’d have to stay on the Ripper case and lead them away, he liked how his life was going too much. When he thought about it, he was happier and healthier with Hannibal then without him. He was good for him.

“Are you seeing anything?”

Will swallowed, the thought coming to the forefront of his mind that *no,* he hadn’t seen even a hint of this mystery animal. “No, actually.” He didn’t like where this was going. “I’m not even seeing any tracks. I mean, except the ones we made.”

Alana was silent, staring behind them. When she looked back in him the pity in her gaze made him sick all over again.

___

Will looked at the body center stage, vocal cords pearly white under the spotlight. He heaved a sigh, shaking his head. This wasn’t the Ripper, but he had skill. He preferred to work with his victims already dead, so he wasn’t doing it out of sadism or any pleasure out of punishing him. He was quick, efficient, a businessman.

“His killer brought him here to… put on a show.” Will could see everything clearly.

“Will, is it me, or is it becoming easier for you to look?” Will almost laughed at the concern- Jack only cared for appearances sake.

“I tell myself… that it's purely an intellectual exercise.” Will said, taking out his aspirin to fix his headache. They were starting up before he really even looked now, almost a constant dull throbbing in his skull.

“Well, in the narrow view of forensics, that’s exactly what it is.” Jack said, stern as ever.

“They’re not any easier Jack. I shake it off, and keep on looking.” Jack was pleased with this. Beverly was worried.

“Good.” Jack stepped closer to him. “You shake it off, get to work.” He motioned for Beverly to follow him, and they left Will alone on stage.

He sighed, and shut his eyes.

___

I open his throat from the outside, to access the trachea and expose the vocal chords. (Clumsily, I nicked it.) I open his throat from the inside using a neck of a cello.

(He had to ignore the pleased trill that went through him at how easily it fit to slide in.)

Powder on the wound?

Rosin from the bow. I wanted to play him. (Used a pre-made one. Lazy-) I wanted to create a sound. Maybe a better one then he could create in life. My sound.

This is my design.

The haunting melody flowed through the empty auditorium, the sounds of one man clapping clearly audible.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs was watching the performance.

___

Will listened to the team as they joked and talked about the body, occasionaly glancing at him worriedly.

“The sulfur dioxide had the effect of hardening the vocal chords-”

“Made them easier to play.” Their heads snapped to him, worriedly observing the first time he had spoken since they arrived at the lab. “Had to open you up to get a decent sound out of you.” He hissed, and the room was filled with the overflowing sense of fear. He scared them. He looked back down at his hands, wringing them obsessively.

“You pick it up and can’t play it, he’ll put you down and play you.” Beverly said, somewhat diffusing the thick aura of terror in the room.

Will wasn’t really listen to anything else, rubbing over his eyes and trying to keep himself from freaking out. Maybe figuring out what Hannibal was had snapped the final teather of his grasp on reality. Maybe he was losing his mind. Losing himself in another's mind.

“He took the time to whiten the vocal chords before playing them.”

“It wasn’t about whitening it was about increasing elasticity.” Will corrected Jimmy, wondering how many things he had thought he’d seen or heard had actually been there.

“He treated the vocal chords the same way you treat catgut string.” She looked up, smiling. “I played the violin.”

Will stood up, walking over and looking down at the bodies. Concern. Overwhelming in it's honestly and how much they actually cared. “This takes a steady hand. A confidence. He’s killed before, but not like this, not for an audience. This is a skilled musician trying a new instrument.”

Will moved to step away from the table, and they followed him. He went to sit by Winston, the four of them forming a circle of sorts on the floor by the dog.

“Will, are you alight?” Came the first question. He kept his eyes shut and took a breath. “Do you want us to get you a longer vacation?”

“No, no. I can still do this, I just… I’m gonna turn in my resignation letter as a teacher.” Will said, rubbing his eyes again.

Beverly nodded to the other two, and they all smiled at him. “Lets go get something to eat together, huh? Get away from this freaky stuff.” She pulled him up to his feet, herding him out the door of the lab with Winston and the boys holding up the rear. With them acting as though everything was fine, he felt as though he could pretend too.

___

“I turned in my resignation as a teacher.” Will said, leaning back onto a pillar in Hannibal’s office. Hannibal paused for a moment, turning back to him with relief in his eyes.

“Might I persuade you to give up the hunt for killers as well?”

Will gave half a smile. “Maybe one day.”

Hannibal seemed sad, resigned for a moment, before he spoke. “Jack told me about your ‘episode’ when you saw the Ripper’s victim on the bus.”

Will froze, trying to keep his breathing even enough that Hannibal wouldn’t detect his suspicions. This game’s risks increased exponentially overnight it seemed, the Chesapeake Ripper wasn’t one to risk his own safety for just about anything. “He had a strong personality. It was all I could do not to drown in it.”

Hannibal looked at him curiously. “The emotional imprint the killer leaves at their scenes is that intense?”

“Yes. Usually I can distance myself enough from it, not this time though.”

Caution overcame Hannibal posture, he was ready to move now if needed. “Any idea why?”

“The Ripper is the most dangerous man I’ve ever tried to empathize with.” Will stated, not for the validity of the statement but in an attempt to ‘subconsciously’ flatter Hannibal. “The pictures normally were as intense as in-person scenes, but that was alot.”

“I would recommend your removal from that case.” Hannibal pressed. He wanted to keep Will in the dark. If Will was kept blind then he was safe to keep.

“I don’t know if I can abandon Jack to it, Doctor.” He wouldn’t risk it.

Hannibal sighed, not wanting to press to hard for fear of giving himself away. *Too late.* “What about this new killer?”

“The display is the only new thing, he's experienced apart from that.” Will corrected. “He made a cello out of a human body, the vocal chords becoming the cords of the instrument.”

Hannibal walked across his office, drawing a book out from a shelf. “Among the first musical instruments were flutes carved from human bone.” He stated, opening the book on his desk. Will could still see Hannibal’s anger and frustration from the week before coiled tightly under his skin. He wondered what reaction he would get if he told him that Alana had come to help him look for a hallucination.

And would he consider it a bad one?

“This murder was a performance.” He spoke, distancing himself from the topic his mind had gone to.

“Every life is a piece of music. Like music we are finite events, unique arrangements, sometimes harmonious, sometimes dissonant.”

“Sometimes not worth hearing again.” Will said darkly.

“He’s a poet and a psychopath.”

“And a craftsman- he was shrinking and tanning the vocal chords.” Will paced around Hannibal’s desk.

“Like turning iron wire into musical steel string.” Hannibal began to follow Will around the desk, and goosebumps ran up Will’s arms as the distinct feeling of being prey dawned on him. “Was there olive oil?”

Will froze. He didn’t think he felt Hannibal, but maybe he was losing his touch. “Yes.”

“Whatever sound he was trying to produce, it was an authentic one. Olive oil hasn't been used in the production of catgut for over a century. It was said to increase the life of the strings amd create a sweeter, more melodic sound.”

Perhaps he just knew alot about old instruments. It seemed like the kind of pretentious thing he would be into. “I hear what he was playing behind my eyes when I close them.”

Hannibal took a step closer, and Will tryed to ensure his fight or flight sense wouldn’t be so obvious. “What do you see behind closed eyes?”

Will felt a shiver run up his spine. “I see myself.” It was a deflection, he didn’t want to talk about Garrett Jacob Hobbs. Didn’t want to give voice to his own horrors that were slowly encompassing the ones of the real world.

“You said the killer was performing. Who was he performing for?”

“I don’t know… Uhm, a patron of the arts? A fellow musician? Or… another killer?” The brutality of the piece was tailored to someone. Someone they didn’t know.

“It’s a serenade.” A calling. Will looked up at Hannibal and it clicked. A killer wanted to partner up with the Ripper.

“This is a deviant from how he usually kills- secluded and private. He doesn’t kill for an audience.” Will debated telling Hannibal that the killer was targeting him, discreetly mentioning parallels to the Ripper. He didn’t want to.

“And you believed he risked getting caught for a serenade?” Will wanted to find him before anyone else, leave him dead the same way he left the human cello. Hannibal was *his*.

“I believe he wants to show someone how well he plays.” Will smiled a bit. “He’s a bit too simple. He’s never displayed anyone before, it's weak how he did it.

Hannibal’s eyes flashed, and the corners of his mouth betrayed a hint of a smile. “How so?”

“He went through all the trouble of creating an instrument out of the man but he didn’t really go all the way. He could have strung the bow as well from the man if he really wanted to make a scene, or contort him into a harp and use the guts for strings instead of parts he didn’t really know would work. It was poor planning. He nicked part of the chords as well when he was opening his throat.” Will didn’t miss the pleased air in the room as Hannibal watched Will critique the other killer. Will sighed, and hid a smile.

“Do you often see places where killers could have done better? Improvements to their methods?”

“Almost all the time.” Will pushed himself off the pillar, walking over to the window. “I’ve never seen much of any in the Ripper’s works.”

Will let out a breath, almost certain he could hear the ravenstag purring behind him.

—

Will left after they had lunch, promising to see him again the next day for their usual appointment. Hannibal was absolutely ecstatic, not even Franklyn could damper his spirits. Will would be so easy to break out of his shell, he already saw the beauty in killing even if it was subconsciously.

He was even starting to consider the risks of curing Will and skipping the isolation phase of his whole plan. Will would be able to see him much clearer, but would he really want to run and tell Jack? There would be some personality changes, but perhaps telling him would win his trust?

Or, Hannibal would have to kill him. That was a bad risk. If Will figured it out too soon and was too clear headed to be passed off as unstable ramblings, there wan't an alternative.

“Do you remember when I said Tobias was saying very dark things?” Franklyn was certainly freaking out. He had rescheduled his appointment to the soonest date possible, babbling about ‘important issues’. Twenty minutes in, he finally decided to speak it seemed.

“I made note of it.”

“Well, he said that he wanted to cut someone’s throat and play it like a violin.” *Oh.* “They found someone, whose throat was cut open and played like a violin!” So, Tobias was the killer.

‘It’s a serenade.’

‘Apparently he can slip into a killers mind and think like them, wear their skin as his own. It’s very fascinating.’

Hannibal suppressed the distaste that nearly slipped through the veil when he made the connection. Hannibal was baffled that such a low-life killer like Tobias could even *think* that anything less than a murder perfectly executed and flawless, tailored to Will’s taste (a bad musciation could *hardly* warrant Will’s wrath) could merit even a *hint* of affection or partnership from Will-than he was an idiot.

And idea flashed briefly in his eyes, trying to calm Franklyn’s worries as the man sputtered out what-ifs and whether or not he should tip off the police. Hannibal tried to persuade him to tell the police, get rid of the threat. Whatever happened to Tobias, Hannibal knew exactly how to proceed with Will.

He hoped Will would like it.

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Will wound the string around the hook, fashioning another lure to use the next time he went fishing. The supplies and such Hannibal got him were very useful, top of the line gear, and he had already noticed an improvement in quality.

Beverly was already looking into string shops and violin players in Baltimore, most certainly someone who had been offended by the way the victim played. It was only a matter of time before they caught him.

Will hoped he would have the chance to shoot on sight.

A scratching came from behind him, and he turned and looked around, all his dogs accounted for, Ripper was sitting on the floor beside him, almost ready to have his cast off. He really was looking much better, his fur had regrown in many places and he tried to run around with Wolf.

Will got up, following his ears to the chimney.

He leaned against the wall, listening carefully. He heard whimpering, there was something trapped in there.

Will ran out to the shed, grabbing a mallet and running back inside. He shut his pack outside of the living room, and raised up the hammer to try and break whatever it was in there out.

___

Alana was concerned, staring at the hole in the wall.

“What kind of animal was it?”

“Might’ve been a raccoon.”

“Might’ve been?”

In reality this was a death sentence.

If he was losing his mind, then he couldn’t be trusted. Even if Hannibal was sure Will was on his side, any instability that would cause a lapse in perception of reality would make him a liability. The Ripper didn’t *have* liabilities. Before there was a chance if Hannibal found out he knew he could be persuaded to keep him alive, but now?

Will knew he’d be put down like a mad dog. Will had done the same many times- Max, Julie, Ernest. Rabies was a bitch.

“Well, by the time I knocked a hole in the chimney it climbed out the top.” Will turned to face her, planning what to do in his head. If Will told Hannibal what he knew and then Hannibal found out he was unstable, he would be dead. Dearly cared for, but dead. He couldn’t hide his instability, not when he didn’t know what was real. So he would have to hide his knowledge. Burry it so deep he forgot about it.

“Well at least it got out.” She said, coming up to lay a hand on his shoulder. He set the hammer down, taking a breath.

“What are you doing out?” he asked, about to tell her to leave so he could go over and tell Hannibal what happened. Play up being a damsel in distress, hope to make himself helpless enough that he would stay safe.

“I thought I’d come over, make some noise, shoo away any predators at your door. It looks like your making plenty of noise all by yourself.” She said, moving closer a tiny bit. Will pulled away walking towards the hole in the wall.

“You avoided being in a room alone with me essentially since I met you. I mean, you were smooth about it.”

“Evidently not smooth enough.” She said, smiling a bit. Will could feel her excitement, where she thought this may be going. He sighed.

“And now you’re making house-calls?”

“Just a drive-by on my way home.” She took a step closer to him. He couldn’t move back- the mantle already pressed into his shoulder blades. “Since you’re not my patient.”

“No,” She took a few more steps, putting a hand on his shoulder. “I’m not.” Alana pulled him down into a kiss, brief and sweet, and Will pulled away.

She tried to lean up, chasing his lips, but he turned his head. “What’s wrong?”

“I should tell Hannibal. About the raccoon.” He said, addressing what they had danced around.

There was *no* raccoon.

“Or you could stay here with me.”

Will looked down at her and shook his head. “What would your advice to yourself be about this?” Will asked, guesting at himself and then the wall. She stepped back, a sad feeling filling the room.

She sighed. “I’ll talk to you later.” She said, and then she was gone. Will waited a bit, cleaning up his living room and covering the hole so the cats wouldn’t play in it, and then got in his own car and started the drive to Baltimore.

___

Hannibal stared across from Tobias, a little less peeved by him once he figured out it was himself Tobias was serenading, and not Will. The brief misunderstanding nearly lead to him

displaying Tobias in one of the manners Will himself described, a personalized show, yet not revealing himself.

Now he was glad he didn't, Tobias being the perfect target to let Will lose on. Another murderer killed by Will's hand, and the realization that he enjoyed it, would be the perfect hook to draw him in further.

Then he could reveal himself, fix the encephalitis, and frame Chilton instead. Or Franklyn. Someone he didn't like as much.

"I apologize for being so blunt Tobias, but I have to ask. Did you kill that trombonist?"

"Do you really have to ask?" He said, a playful mirth in his eyes. He wanted companionship.

"No. Just changing the subject." Hannibal already *had* a companion.

"Franklyn gave you my message."

"The murder is being investigated by the FBI. They're going to find you."

"Let them find me."

"You want to get caught?" Hannibal asked, freezing in surprise. Tobias was dumber then he looked. It would be all too easy to send Will in against him.

"I want them to try. They may investigate me because I own a string shop." Or because Hannibal pointed their bloodhound straight at him. Will already knew Tobias was a killer. Simply mentioning that he had a string shop and that Franklyn had fears about him would get Tobias caught. "They'll send men to investigate and I'll kill them. Then I'll find Franklyn and kill him. Then I would disappear."

"Don't kill Franklyn." Hannibal said, barely suppressing the sarcasm in his tone.

"I've been looking forward to it. Actually…" Tobias leaned in, a silly sort of smile on his face, as though he was about to share some funny secret. "I was going to kill you."

"Of course you were. I'm lean. Lean animals yield the toughest gut." Hannibal assured, taking another sip of his wine. "What stopped you from wanting to kill me? Or have you stopped?"

"I stopped after I followed you one night. Out of town. To a lonely road. To a bus yard." Hannibal went still, calmly glancing up at him and letting the mask drop.

"You're reckless, Tobias." He warned.

"I'm not going to tell anyone what I saw you do and do *well* ." He smiled, a teasing tilt to his tone. "Does your pet profiler know?" Tobias shook his head, leaning back. "My recklessness doesn't concern you.

“It concerns me, because you won't be drawing attention just to yourself.” Hannibal stated, getting up and walking over to where he left the pitcher of wine. Tobias rose to his feet behind him, standing so he appeared on equal footing as Hannibal.

“I could use a friend. Someone who can understand me.” Hannibal knew the feeling. “Who thinks like I do and can see the world and the people in it the way I do.”

“I know exactly how you feel. But I don’t want to be your friend.” He already had Will, or was going to have him by any rate. He didn’t want nor need Tobias.

“Then why did you invite me here for dinner?” Tobias asked, simple in his mind. Assuming the best when he should have assumed the worst. “Wasn’t just to restring your harpsichord.”

“I was going to kill you.” Tobias glanced down at the plate and Hannibal smiled, just a bit. “I didn’t poison you Tobias, I wouldn’t do that to the food.” The scent of fear overtook the air, bitter and adrenaline filled. Tobias didn’t know if he meant the food on the plate or himself.

Hannibal meant both.

The doorbell rang, stopping him from taking any more steps forward.

“Expecting someone?” Tobias asked, fear in his tone.

“No.”

___

Will rung his hands outside Hannibal’s door, trying to decide what the *hell he would say.* Did he start with the raccoon? Should he omit what happened with Alana? What would Hannibal do if he found out-

“I kissed Alana Bloom.” he spoke, swiftly walking inside past Hannibal. Well, the cat was out of the bag *now.* Hannibal was a blank wall, and Will would have preferred boiling anger to whatever this was. He knew he had made a huge mistake- Hannibal had been angry enough recently.

“Come in.” He said, delayed. Will walked to the dining room, observing the second plate on the table. Wow, he was being *stupid.*

“You have a guest?”

“A colleague. You just missed him.” Hannibal went over to the window, closing it. Will knew where this ‘colleague’ had left through. He had been meeting with someone.

“Didn’t finish his dinner.” *Couldn’t be seen in Hannibal’s home.*

“An urgent call of some sort. He had to leave suddenly.” Hannibal turned to him and smiled. “This benefits you, because I have dessert for two.” Will had a feeling that this would *not end well.*

“Tell me. What happened?”

“We were talking, and she pushed closer to me, and then I didn’t have anywhere to push back, and-”

“Will.” Hannibal gently stopped his rambling. “I have no doubts that you are faithful to me Will. That is why you felt compelled to drive an hour in the snow to Baltimore to tell me about it.” Will relaxed minutely. It wasn’t *him* he was really worried about.

“It's not just that.”

“No?” Hannibal turned to him, concern finally coming through. That was something at least.

“I heard an animal in my chimney. I broke through the wall to get it out, and nothing was there.” Will started to tremble. “This isn’t the first time I’ve heard something that wasn’t there, and-” Will broke himself off, looking away. Hannibal finished preparing their desert, glancing up at him with concern.

“Why was Alana there?”

“She said it was a drive-by drop in on her way home. She was concerned about me.”

Hannibal went eerily still and looked at him, studying him like he was under a microscope. Will noticed his nose twitch, and then he started to move again.

“I sleepwalk, I get headaches. I am hearing things. I feel unstable.” Will heard his voice break, Hannibal remaining the picture of calm.

“You said yourself, what you do is not good for you.”

“Well, unfortunately I am good for it.” Will shook, rubbing his eyes.

“Are you still hearing this killer’s serenade behind your eyes?” Will huffed a laugh.

“Well, it's our song.” Anger, flashed up behind the mask, a crack finally reappearing. Will was handed his dessert, and he smiled his thanks at Hannibal.

“I hesitate telling you this,” Will could feel that he didn’t, he was almost *giddy* about his next words, “As it borders on a violation of doctor-patient confidentiality. A patient we both know told me today he suspects a friend of his may be involved with the murder at the symphony.”

“A friend we both know?” Will realized who had been here earlier- Tobias Budge. Hannibal telling him this showed he rejected Budge’s offer. If Will killed him, maybe Hannibal would keep him.

“He owns a music store in Baltimore, specializing in string instruments. Perhaps you should interview him.”

Will sighed. “I’ll tell Jack.”

Will grabbed his coat and walked out, not wanting to stay where Hannibal seemed so on the edge. He left his dessert still on the counter, uneaten, leaving Hannibal to eat alone and clean up in silence.

___

White noise.

Hannibal didn’t really think, as the EMT’s patched him up, and the police took his statement.

‘I just killed two men.’

Will…

Hannibal had thought, thought that this *, this* could be his becoming. Tracking down a killer that Hannibal pointed him too, another life taken and Will could truly feel the power and joy from it. Confide in Hannibal and let him help him down this new path.

Now Will was dead.

Will was dead, and he was left with a surrogate daughter he had wanted to take in *with* Will. Left with a present he bought, and a fancy dinner planned, just because *congratulations,* you caught another one. Just because he felt the want, the need to see Will smile, to see him happy.

He was never going to see another one of Will’s rare smiles again.

Already he was trying his best to remember him exactly, capture every detail in his memory palace, as he was the night before when Hannibal had sent him stupidly after Tobias in a jealous rage. He had coldly greeted him, had made him feel so unwelcome that he had ran at the first chance, and now he was gone.

Four men were dead, all his own fault, and for the first time he felt remorse for one.

He debated turning himself into Jack, punishing himself for this horrible crime, but realized that he still had to take care of the pack. They were all he had left of Will, he would ask Jack if Winston had made it out okay or died protecting his master.

Jack. This was his fault too.

Sending Will in with *one* other officer, depriving him of Phantom and sending him further off kilter despite his pleadings and Hannibal's own advice not too. Despite Beverly's warnings and concern. Despite Alana's opinion from the start. This was Jack's fault too.

Hed move away, start somewhere fresh, with Abigail. Jack would *never* find the Chesapeake Ripper. He was already constructing his torment- mailing him parts of Miriam, more calls, driving him mad and off the edge once Bella was gone.

Alana would need a visit too- preferably a quick death after all the friendship and happy moments she had brought over the years. He respected her, and she didn't know, but it was unforgivable.

Jack came into the room. He looked at Hannibal, his face grave. Doctor Lecter braced himself for the pain, for the confirmation of what he already knew to be true.

His nose caught the faint scent of cheap cologne, whiskey, and animal dander.

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Will stepped into Doctor Lecter's office, seeing the two body bags on the floor. He swallowed dry, his throat audibly clicking. He hesitated briefly before turning to Hannibal's desk, and, seeing Hannibal sitting behind it, smiled with relief.

Walking further into the room, his mind recreated what happened. He glanced back at the bags as he walked towards the desk, knowing that both died by Hannibal's hands. He sat on the edge of his desk, and looked into marron eyes brimming with tears. Hannibal reached out for his hand, holding it as tightly as he could. He noticed Will's wince, and then the bandages, and loosened it a bit.

When he turned to Will, the mask was completely lowered.

"I was worried you were dead."

Will knew then Hannibal would never kill him.

Jack walked towards them stopping in front of the desk. "Tobias Budge killed two Baltimore Police officers, nearly killed an FBI special agent, and after all that, his first stop is here, at your office." Jack was quiet, distrustful. Will opened his mouth to defend him, noticing Hannibal hadn't taken his eyes off Will's face, but thankfully he *was* actually listening to Jack.

"He came to kill my patient."

Will saw an out- a clear and clean end. "Your patient, is that who Budge was serenading?"

"I don't know." He spoke, still not looking away from Will. He didn't know Will was lying, but Will was happy he took the opportunity Will presented to him. "Franklyn knew more

than he was telling me. He told Mr. Budge that he didn't have to kill anymore. And then he broke Franklyn's neck, and then he attacked me."

"You killed him?" Hannibal finally looked away from Will, up at Jack, and then down at the floor. He nodded, breathily confirming with his voice.

Will had to admit, it was convincing. If it wasn't for the newfound smug feeling filling the air around him, that *he* was the better predator, that *he* won, that Will was *alive*- Will would have second guessed himself.

"Could Franklyn have been involved in whatever Budge was doing?"

"I thought this was a simple matter of poor choice in friends."

"This doesn't feel simple to me." Jack said, turning and talking with the other officers there.

"I feel like I've dragged you into my world."

"I got here on my own, but I appreciate the company." Will sighed, squeezing Hannibal's hand. Hannibal took it, pressing a gentle kiss to the bandages. "What happened?"

"Tobias came at me from behind. He tried to strangle me with piano wire I think. I got my hands in between my throat and the strands and tried to shoot him." Will laughed shakily. "I can't hear anything out of my left ear right now."

Hannibal closed his eyes, pressing his nose to Will's wrist and breathing in. "He tried to use a wire on me as well."

Will could see that. He could see everything in perfect detail. Especially when Hannibal looked in his eyes. He trusted Hannibal. He would keep him safe as much as he could. If that meant he had to quit the FBI if he got too crazy, so be it.

"Will, I want you to come back to headquarters with me and-"

"Not tonight Jack." Will denied him, hoping off the desk and looking around for a cane of some sort to help Hannibal walk.

"Will-"

"Doctor Lecter has helped me through so much, let me take care of him tonight. Get him home, make sure he can get up the stairs to his bedroom, make him dinner so he doesn't aggravate his leg-"

Jack sighed. "He can call Alana to help him with that-"

"But, I'm already here."

"I'm sure Doctor Lecter doesn't need a dog in his expensive car, and has had quite enough of patient's for a while Will-" Jack stepped around the desk, taking Will by the arm. Hannibal stood, tightening his grip on Will's hand and putting an arm around his shoulder.

“Agent Crawford, Will has been through enough today as well, and I’d love to spend some time with Winston. If you’ll excuse us, are we free to go?”

Jack didn’t look happy, but nodded and stepped out of the way. Will smiled at him briefly, carrying most of his weight off his bad leg and helping him down to the bentley.

Will settled Hannibal in the passenger seat, buckling him in.

“I’ll go grab Winston. Beverly will drop by Jack to grab my keys and then get my car from Budge’s.”

“Where was Winston during the attack?” Hannibal asked. Will visibly flinched, remembering the dog’s warning bark right before Tobias kicked him, instruments and equipment falling in a mass on top of the dog. Winston shook it off to chase Tobias out of the basement after the shot, but then was more concerned with Will once Tobias was out of sight.

“He did his best. Tobias was able to toss him away with one kick. He’s alright, a bit bruised but not too badly injured.” Will closed the door, walking over to Jack’s car to grab Winston. He opened the back door, Hannibal watching him intently as he got out the blanket.

“Leave it.” He spoke, whistling for Winston to jump straight in. Will smiled at him, covering the dog with the blanket instead of using it to protect the seat. Winston whined a bit, laying back. “We should stop by a veterinary office. Just to make sure he’s okay.” Hannibal said, turning back just a bit too look at him.

Will laughed a bit, feeling the genuine concern and care Hannibal felt for the dog. “I’m rubbing off on you.”

Hannibal smiled, watching him giggle in the drivers seat. He reached over, taking Will’s hand.

“Would that be so bad?” Will stopped laughing slowly, smiling over at Hannibal.

“Mmm, no it wouldn’t. Right, vets office, then home.” Will started the engine, pulling out of the parking lot and driving towards the nearest hospital.

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They gave them some pain meds and did some x-rays on Winston, the dog coming out bruised, but just fine. Hannibal gave them a check, Will rolled his eyes, and then they went back to Hannibal’s house.

Winston settled right into bed, and Will helped Hannibal find a cane to lean on.

“Should I make us some lunch?”

Will shook his head. “You got stabbed. In the leg. I’ll make lunch. You have sandwich stuff, right?” Will walked into the kitchen, Hannibal limping slowly behind him, and began to prepare lunch, slicing fruits and looking around for other things. Will sighed, finding the unsliced bread and block of cheese.

“Do you have pre-sliced ham or do we have to cook new stuff?”

“ *I* can finish this, you’ve been through too much today, and you are a guest in my home.” Hannibal stepped up behind him, taking the knife from him.

“You were stabbed. And went through a hell of a lot harder fight-”

“And I will only recover if I keep moving.” Hannibal gently nudged him out of the way, slicing the bread.

“That doesn’t sound right Hannibal. You can rest, you know.” Will opened the fridge, finding a container with raw *something* in it. “Can I cook this up for lunch?”

Hannibal hesitated, then nodded. Will went to find a pan, buttering it up after slicing the meat and starting to roast it.

Will looked at Hannibal, who was leaning heavily on the counter to slice the cheese now, and he went into the dining room to grab a chair. He ignored the protests as he put it behind Hannibal, settling him in so he could continue without hurting his leg.

“If you’re going to be stubborn, at least let me help make it not hurt.” He said, rubbing Hannibal’s back and leaning gently on his shoulder. Hannibal sighed, leaning into the touch and reaching a hand up to curl in Will’s hair. “Let's eat and then get cleaned up. You have more than one pair of clothes that aren’t ridiculous suits, right?” Will said, moving to pull away, but Hannibal’s hold tightened in his hair. “Hannibal, I need to tend to the meat-”

“Quit the FBI.” Hannibal said sternly. “Quit the FBI and I’ll let go.”

“Hannibal, I can’t.”

“Then stop field work. Only go in when Jack needs you too look at a body, let Beverly and Jack handle the living.”

Will nodded slowly. “I’ll try-”

“No. You will.” He turned, pressing his nose into Will’s jaw. “I thought you were dead Will. I can’t have that happen. Never.”

“Okay.” He relented, hearing the break in Hannibal’s voice. “Can I stop the meat from burning now?”

Hannibal slowly let go of Will’s hair, and he went back over to flip the thin steaks over. He paused, wondering what would happen if he told Hannibal now. If his life was guaranteed…

He decided to just let it sit. Hannibal would realize sooner or later that Will figured it out early. He would start hinting now, rather than saying it outright.

He would prove he was okay to be trusted, even as his mind spiraled down the gutter.

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They ate quietly, holding hands. Hannibal hadn't been concealing much of anything, Will was getting large quantities of rather endearing emotions from him all the time. This was nice, and Will wondered if he could convince Hannibal to let him keep everyone if they moved in together.

Hannibal would probably drug him some nights, ensuring Will wouldn't wake up to an empty house and a new body in the morning. Will found he was fine with that. He found he was fine with most anything Hannibal could or would do to him.

Will found he was in love.

He helped Hannibal up the stairs, making sure he kept his footing.

"Why do you live in such a big house?"

"It seemed a good idea at the time, I did not foresee any great leg injuries."

"Like getting stabbed?" Will asked cheekily. Hannibal looked at him, irritation and affection in his eyes.

"Yes, Will, like getting stabbed."

"Guess you don't have to deal with Franklyn anymore now huh?" Will joked as he pushed into Hannibal's en-suite bathroom.

Hannibal paused for a moment, reading the mirth in Will's eyes with confusion, then he started giggling. "I suppose not, no."

Will laughed again, looking around. "So, uhm, should I leave you to it?"

Will watched Hannibal drop the cane, straightening up and walking towards Will with sure steps. Hannibal cupped his jaw in one hand and grabbed a handful of his hair in the other, tilting his head up to kiss him. Will moaned in surprise, placing his hands up on his partners shoulders before closing his eyes and melting into the kiss.

Will tasted blood, Hannibal's assault on his mouth aggravating the cut lip he had sustained from Tobias earlier. He felt fire start to stir in his belly from the taste, leaning up further to meet each kiss with nips and licks of his own.

He barely registered hands unbuttoning his shirt until it was pushed off his shoulders and hitting the ground. He reached up to undo Hannibal's jacket and waistcoat, pushing them off

as well. Hannibal pulled back, leaving Will feeling a bit dazed as he watched him unbutton his own shirt.

“Start the water going, mylimasis.” Hannibal ordered, shucking the garment to land somewhere on the tiled floor. Will nodded, filing the endearment away to google later, and turned to fumble with the faucet. He heard the clink of metal as Hannibal dropped his pants, shoes thumping as they were tugged off.

Will tested the temperature of the water with his hands, noting distantly that the bandages the EMTs had places over them were getting soaked through. He let out a yelp as Hannibal grabbed the belt of his pants from behind, reaching around to undo the buckle and all but tear the zipper and button open and ripping the pants off him with his boxers. He stood up and turned around, pulling Hannibal in by the back of the neck into another kiss.

Hannibal ran his hands down Will’s back, his hands grasping his ass gently for a moment, smiling at the squeak it pulled from Will. He then moved his hands to the back of Will’s thighs, picking him up and stepping into the shower with him. Will moaned as he was pinned to the wall, wrapping his legs around Hannibal’s waist for support. Hannibal closed the shower door behind them, and then continued his plundering of Will’s mouth.

Will bucked his hips gently, wanting friction but not wanting to throw Hannibal off balance. Hannibal broke the kiss to start sucking on his neck, peppering love bites and kitten licks along the right side of his neck. Will moaned, baring his neck and noticing the bandages covering Hannibal's left wrist, now also wet under the spray of the shower.

“Ah, Hannibal- your leg, Mm-” Will was cut off as Hannibal roughly thrust against him, gripping tightly to his silver-blonde hair and the nape of his neck. Hannibal reached a hand down between them, grasping both of their dicks together and starting up a fast pace. Will threw his head back with a thump, moaning loudly. He hadn’t been touched like this in *years,* much less by someone who wasn’t thinking about someone else. He was surrounded by sensation, most acutely aware of the pure adoration and love rolling off Hannibal in waves, all directed at him.

It was overwhelming, Will confusing their emotions as he felt his orgasm building. Hannibal finally took a breath from devouring Will’s neck, pulling his head up to lick over the shell of his ear and take a deep breath from his hair. Words from a language he didn’t know flowed into his ear, and he guessed it was dirty talk of some sort or some kind of praise from the emotions flowing off of Hannibal. He began to babble helplessly in return, begging and whining as his eyes rolled back in his head. Will let out a long groan, cumming over their stomachs in jerky spurts.

Hannibal was set off shortly after, hips bucking and pressing Will harder against the cool tile. Will felt himself be gently lowered to the floor, Hannibal leaning down to lick their mixed release off his belly. The water cleaned the rest of him, and he stared blankly at the fogged glass that separated the two of them from the rest of the world, absentmindedly petting Hannibal’s hair.

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They sat on the edge of the bathtub, a separate facility from the shower, and redressed their wounds. Will took Hannibal's hand, leading them into the bedroom and collapsing soundly into the sheets. Hannibal wrapped himself around Will, chest to back and legs entangled, and buried his nose in the curls at the nape of Will's neck. Will heard him inhale, and smiled.

"I shouldn't have let you do that, your leg must be killing you." Will broke the silence, shifting further back into Hannibal.

"It's very distant from my mind." He answered, enclasping their hands together.

"Mmm." Will glanced at the clock. "It's only four, we shouldn't fall asleep yet." Will said, moving to get up. Hannibal tightened his grip around him, keeping him in bed.

"I can think of other things to do while still in bed." He rumbled out behind him, Will not bothering to hide the pleased shiver that ran up his spine at the undertone of the words.

The doorbell went off, and Hannibal huffed. He glared at the doorway of the bedroom for a moment, before the sound went off again. He got out of bed, and Will watched as he dressed himself in his red sweater and sweatpants.

Hannibal sighed, glaring at the bathroom as his phone started to ring. Will hoped out of bed, and Hannibal handed him a pair of pajamas. Will got dressed, watching as Hannibal left the room to go get the door, which rang for the third time. He went into the bathroom to retrieve their clothes as well as their phones, folding everything to the best of his ability.

"I'm sorry for showing up so suddenly, I was really worried and wanted to see how the two of you were." Alana's voice rang out through the hallway, and Will froze. He sent out a silent prayer that Hannibal wouldn't snap while he was there, or even at all towards Alana, and walked out into the kitchen, where Hannibal was starting dinner prep. He only had a slight limp, and was handling it much better than he was with Jack.

It was an act then, to make him seem more of a victim. Alana turned to him, surprise written on her features as she took in the outfit. "Will! Are you okay? How's Winston?"

He motioned to the hallway. "Hannibal outfitted one of his spare rooms for me and the dogs, he's just fine." When he turned back, Alana's mouth was open in shock. Moreso then when she saw the pajamas. Hannibal was staring at him with a pleased gaze as well, smug and victorious.

Oh no.

"Jesus, Jack wasn't kidding when he said Budge strangled you!" Hannibal's smile fell, distaste evident in his aura. Will held back a laugh, Alana walking up to him and grabbing his face to get a better look at the right side of his neck.

Hannibal did not like that, he was stirring whatever he was making just a bit too harshly. “Yeah, I can’t hear out of my left ear either. I’m just glad Winston was okay, and that Hannibal was able to beat him.” Will smiled largely at Hannibal, who relaxed a bit.

“Do your hands hurt too bad?” She asked, reaching out to hold them. “I’ll come by and help you take care of things while they heal, you shouldn’t be using them.”

“Alana is right Will. I also should stay off stairs for the next couple weeks. Perhaps I could stay with you until then?”

“You be my hands, I’ll be your legs?” Will laughed, moving past Alana to stand next to Hannibal in the kitchen. She was a tad disappointed- but this made Hannibal happier. better disappointed then dead.

“Indeed. And I can be your ears, if you have another episode.” Will turned away, a bitter feeling filling the air.

“You’ll be fine Will. We’re here to help you.” Alana said, coming behind him and rubbing his back.

“I saw something earlier. I heard a dog get hit by a car when I was in Budge’s shop, and then when I stepped outside I saw something… something that shouldn’t have been there.”

Hannibal glanced at him, concern evident in his gaze. “Why didn’t you mention this earlier.”

“We weren’t talking about my lack of mental stability earlier. Besides, it saved my life. I wasn’t in the shop when he attacked the other two and killed them.”

“Will, you are stable. Stable enough.” Alana assured him. “This is probably caused by stress, we should tell Jack to let you leave the force.”

“No, no I can’t do that.” Will said forcefully. He stepped out of the kitchen area, walking back into the hallway. “I’m going to check up on Winston.” He said, leaving the two to talk.

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Will drove back home after dinner, and Hannibal said he had some things to attend to in his study before he left to stay with Will. He said Will should take the bentley, go home, and stay with his dogs for a bit, and he wouldn’t be long. He’d get a taxi.

Will knew half of the excuses he made were horseshit. He was going to kill again. Probably Alana, maybe Jack.

Will couldn’t find it in himself to care.

Beverly greeted him with open arms, hugging him tightly and scolding him for almost dying. She handed over the keys to his car, and they went back to it to drive her home.

Will waited up, remembering the appointment he had at the vets tomorrow morning for Ripper. Hannibal would help him take the cat.

He ended up falling asleep in one of his arm chairs, cats curled around him and dogs sleeping at his feet.

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Will awoke the next morning in his own bed, with Hannibal beside him. He had gotten out some of Will's extra blankets and such, and Will noticed that he swept. Phantom had a big smile on his face as he slept, stretched out pressed against Hannibal's back. Will had to hold back a laugh at the sheer amount of animals surrounding them, and surprisingly Hannibal was still asleep.

Will's smile faded when his cell phone began to vibrate, caller ID reading Jack Crawford. Alana then.

Hannibal had opened his eyes immediately, and seeing the depressed look on his face, gave him a soft good morning kiss. Will smiled again, answering his phone.

"Jack?"

"It's the Ripper." Will sighed, pinching his nose.

"Any ID on the victim?"

"A CEO. Morgan Newsbane? They're one of the people who head PETA."

Will's brows furrowed in confusion. "So the Ripper's got a soft spot for animals?" He said, trying to hide the true purpose of the kill. This was a gift, he knew already. Jack made a noise of confusion. "PETA doesn't help shit- they actually break into people's homes to euthanize their pets. Any animals they 'rescue' they kill. Not to mention their partnership with Autism Speaks." Will sat up in bed, disgust growing in his tone as he continued.

"Okay, well, I'm on my way over to pick you up. Be ready in ten." Jack hung up the phone, and Will sighed.

"I gotta go, will you take Ripper in without me?"

"Of course." Hannibal assured, watching him get dressed. Will sat back down on the bed after putting on Winston's vest, giving Hannibal a firm kiss.

"You know, I really can't blame the Ripper for this one. I'd go for PETA too."

“I’m sure you’ll tell me all the details.” Will snorted, picking up Winston’s leash as he heard the car pull up.

“You’re not my therapist right now, Doctor Lecter. Lets wait until you're back in session. I love you, bye.” Will shut the door behind him, and got into Jack’s car before realizing what he just let slip. He smiled, knowing it would mean the world to have Will say it first.c

“Right, so this is really gruesome. I want you to prepare yourself.”

Will couldn’t *wait.*

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: I have never seen a penis before, and as a gay, only have a vague idea of how they work.

Also it may be a while before the next chapter, Finals are here and my dog isn't doing so great.

Thanks for reading!

Trou-Normand

Chapter Summary

Will's grasp on reality starts to slip a bit more.
Abigail gets closer to family.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will stepped out of Jack's car, the observatory yet again the place where the Ripper decided to stage his scene. Will would have to ask Hannibal about why he chose this place so often once everything was on the table. Winston barked, head fully out of the window as he stared at Beverly. She smiled shakily.

"Jack, Will." She greeted them. "I don't think Will should see this-"

"He's here. He needs to look, Katz." Jack pushed past her, into the observatory. Will took a breath and followed.

The scene found there was absolutely breathtaking.

The woman was completely gutted- all but her reproductive organs ripped from her body with surgical precision. Her thighs were missing as well, only the lower half of her legs left. They were ripped up and torn apart as if a dog had eaten at them.

Her womb was cut open, hunks and pieces of several baby dolls inside. Her mouth was open in a scream, tongue and eyes missing as well. Bite marks and tears littered her arms, as if dogs tore her apart. The bleached skull of a canine animal was still biting into her throat.

Growing out of her head was a garden, flowers planted in the hollow there. There were tinted red, a darker purple maroon in the center.

" Dianthus barbatus." Jimmy spoke, motioning to the flower. "Common name, Sweet William."

Not one for subtlety, Doctor Lecter?

"Between that and the victim…" Brian looked up, catching Will's eye. "He's targeting you, Will."

Jack nodded, grim in his expression. "Clear the room."

"Jack-"

“I said, *clear the room.* ”

Beverly bit her lip, watching Brian and Jimmy scatter. “I’ll be fine, Bev.” Will assured, gently laying a hand on her arm.

“I’ll be outside with Winston.”

Will looked at the woman, took a breath, and let the pendulum swing,

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I keep her awake and aware as I cut her open, taking from her what she does not deserve. Something precious was left here, and so I work quickly. The thighs I strip the meat from and cut the bone with care. She loses her tongue and eyes while still awake, and I let her sit until she is close to dead.

She meets the same fate she has carried out on so many others, the needle sliding into the back of her neck with eaze.

This is merciful for what she has done.

I disconnect her from the machines I used to keep her alive, leaving the reproductive organs in a mockery of her previous actions. (What did I find her doing?)

I leave her with plastic children, dead like her, a fitting punishment to the crime.

I saw open her skull, taking her mind and throwing it away. A waste, but it’s not worth the trouble.

With great care, I fill her skull with potting soil, taking the flowers I had cultivated and planting them inside.

I take the skull of a hound, marking her and cutting her as she deserved.

This is a gift to my beloved.

This is my design.

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Will smiled softly as he opened his eyes, the gruesome scene clearly a heartfelt love letter. He sighed, and pinched himself, tapping into the victim's emotions of panic and fear.

The tears came easily, and then the screaming. Beverly rushed in, shielding him from Jack and all but carrying him outside to Winston.

“Shh Shh, you’re safe, you’re with me, Winston is here-”

“He-he-” Will stuttered, putting on his best scared face. He felt bad about worrying Beverly like this, but otherwise he wouldn’t be convincing.

“What did you see Will?” Jack asked, shouldering Beverly out of the way.

“I-i-it, It's not-”

“I already called, we’re putting a safety guard on you 24/7. He’s targeting you isn’t he? He’s mad your getting close-”

“No-no-no, he’s not *mad* at me, this, this is a gift.”

Jack froze, looking at Will with concern. “A gift?”

“Someone *I* would consider rude, would kill if I had his capacity-”

“He thinks your hands are tied so he’s acting for you?” Zeller made the jump. Will noded shakily.

“He *likes* me. He likes how I think. He likes how I- I can *understand.* He’s lonely, and I’m just the companion.”

“Jesus fucking christ.” Jack breathed, moving back and rubbing over his face with his hands. Winston whined, licking away his tears. Beverly took off her jacket, giving it to him to keep warm.

“I think Will should take Phantom back. Safety- he’s allowed right? We can fight Freddie Lounds if she tries to take him away?”

“Yeah. Will, I don’t want you without both Winston and Phantom. I want to put someone in with you."

Will nodded shakily. “Doctor Lecter is staying with me right now- the stairs in his house were too m-much and my h-hands are still injured.”

“Well, when he has to go back to work I want to get a guard on you twenty-four seven understood?”

“I can move in with him for a while.” Beverly spoke out. “The lease on my apartment is coming to an end this month, I can just not renew-”

“Do you think the Ripper would attack her?” Jack leaned down, trying to look Will in the eye. “Would it increase the risk to have her there?”

“No Jack.” Will stated. “She’s safe.”

He pursed his lips, seemingly not satisfied but nodding anyway. “Get him back home. We’ll handle the rest of the stuff here. We won’t bring you in again for another Ripper murder.”

Will nodded, leaning into her when she helped him to her feet and moved him and Winston to her car. He heard Jack shouting more orders, one them being to keep any news of what Will found away from the press. They kept this secret.

“Katz!” They turned back to look at Jack. “Keep your gun on you at all times. You shoot to kill any foreign intruders.”

Will sat in her car, laughing shakily.

“It’ll be okay Will. I won’t let anything happen to you.” She smiled at him, warm and tender, and started the engine, driving back to Wolf Trap.

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Hannibal put the two carriers back into the bentley, Ripper had no issues with his cast. The cat meowed loudly and with complaint as the dog in the crate above it started howling, a great pyrenees puppy, the only survivor of a litter of six. He had found her with her mother and siblings when he attacked the PETA agent, the rest of them already euthanized. He hadn’t planned to take the puppy with him, but he knew Will would love the new addition.

Beverly’s car was in the driveway when he got back, and he took the two animals inside.

Will was asleep, Phantom and Winston curled up around him with an assortment of cats, and he set the crate with Ripper down to release him. The sound of a gun cocking made him look up, Beverly standing in the doorway with her handgun pointed at him.

“Oh, Doctor Lecter.” She lowered it, snapping it back into her holster. “Forgive me, Jack said to shoot any trespassers on sight.”

“May I ask why?” He feigned concern, knowing *exactly* why. Will had read the scene for what it was. And told, disappointingly, told Jack.

“The Ripper has taken a liking to Will. Good news means he gets Phantom with him now, bad news is he can never be alone.”

Phantom could never be a threat. The dogs adored Hannibal- even Buster listened to him. “So, the FBI takes shifts covering him?”

“I’m gonna move in with him. I'm not planning on following his every move. That's ridiculous. I’ll be out of your hair for date night’s, as long as you guys have Harley with you too.”

“I had hoped to surprise him with another as well.” He lifted the small puppy up for Beverly to see, and she cooed at it. “I found it at the vets, someone’s Pyrenees had puppies and couldn’t take care of them.”

“Will would have taken the entire litter.”

“I have to perform some sort of control of his habits.” Hannibal set the carrier down, opening the door and taking the puppy out. It wiggled in his hands, whining and howling. He set it by Will’s face, Winston and Phantom already awake and exited at the new addition, practically climbing over Will to lick their new friend hello.

“Ugh, Buster, get off…” Will turned over, opening his eyes. Hannibal felt his heart stop in his chest at the brilliant smile that overtook Will’s features, pure joy as he scooped the pup up and began to baby talk it, cooing and coddling.

Winston got excited as well, barking out and wagging his tail hard enough to fall off the bed.

“Hello Will.”

“Oh, Hannibal. Is this for me?” The puppy continued to lick his face, hopping up and excitedly whining.

“She is. She was at the vets-”

“Oh I don’t care where she came from I *love* her.” Will said, cradling the puppy tenderly.

Beverly laughed, walking over to tossle Will’s hair and grab her keys from the side table. “I’ll be off. Try not to *aggravate* any injuries while I’m gone.” She waved, walking out the front door, shutting it before either of them could say goodbye back.

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She was at the vets. Will knew that was horseshit. He got this dog from the woman. Will thought she was lovely.

Hannibal sat next to him after he removed his coat and gloves, and Will scooted closer so he was leaning into his side.

“She has all the most recent vaccines, and the vet said she was in perfect health.”

“She’s a Pyrenees?” Will smiled. “I think I’ll call her Bear.”

“Hello Bear.” Hannibal said, reaching out and scratching one ear. Will smiled at him, holding back giggles. “Beverly told me what happened today. The Ripper likes you?”

“Yeah.” Will set the dog down, rubbing his eyes. “Jack’s gone into overdrive, really freaked him out.”

Hannibal rubbed a hand up and down his side, kissing his head and taking a ‘discreet’ sniff. “What about you?”

“I’ll be fine. He took me off the case. I have Phantom and Winston, my hunting rifle isn’t too far away at any time, I’m good.” Will brushed off any fake concerns Hannibal might pretend to have, watching as Phantom scruffed the puppy to cuddle her in one of the dog beds.

“Will-”

“I’m fine Hannibal. I promise.” Will assured again, noting that there was some real worry in his voice. Not for his safety though. He turned to smile brightly up at him, giving him a firm kiss. “Now, what's lunch?”

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Hannibal went back home a few days later, and Beverly moved in. The Ripper completed his sounder, and then went silent.

Will sighed as he started at the huge stash of dog and cat food Hannibal had made while he was there. He still wasn’t exactly *happy* about where the meat came from, but what else was Will going to do?

He fed the cats, yawning as he walked downstairs to feed the dogs. Beverly was still asleep, the time being before 6 am. Will had woken up in the bathtub, and couldn’t get back to sleep.

His phone started ringing, and he answered it as he watched his dogs run across the white expanse of meadow. Bear stayed by the house, squeaking at Phantom as he tried to teach her to howl.

“We got something for you Will.”

He sighed, rubbing his temples. “What is it Jack?”

“We got a whole lot bodies. Grafton, West Virginia. I’ll text you directions.”

“Oh Jesus, first thing in the morning?” He sighed. “I’ll get Beverly and the dogs up.”

“See you soon.”

Will huffed, going back inside and heading upstairs. Beverly was already awake, talking on the phone with Jimmy. She nodded at him, pulling on her jacket, and headed downstairs to put toast in the toaster and start making coffee.

He smiled, and got himself dressed and ready, putting Phantom and Winston in their vests. Beverly handed him a cup as they walked out the door, and he took a sip, rubbing his temples as his headache would not die down.

—

He popped a few aspirin dry as he got out of the car, Beverly glanced at him worriedly. Jack lead them over to the scene, and Beverly split off and got to work.

“Worlds sickest jigsaw puzzle.” Brian joked, lifting his camera to take more pictures. He wasn’t wrong.

Will stared up at the totem of bodies, oldest at the bottom, freshest at the top. This was a monument.

“But where are the corners?”

“What?” Brian turned to his friend, eyebrows knitted together with confusion.

“My mom always said, start a jigsaw with the corners.”

“Uhh.” Will watched the two look up at the bound bundle of corpses, concern on their faces. “The heads are the corners I guess?” Will wondered if all of them were a bit mad- maybe you had to be to do this job. Maybe he was alright.

“We got too many corners. Seven graves, way to many heads.” Beverly pointed out.

“The headpiece appears to be the only recent victim. The others are years, even decades old. At least seven of them were buried on the beach.” Will looked around at the neat graves, perfect rectangular holes in the ground.

“Whoever dug them up knew exactly where they were buried.”

“Killing them once wasn’t enough. He came back to defile his victims.”

“These graves weren’t desecrated, Jack. They were exposed.”

Jack looked up at the totem pole, nodding at Will. “Okay everybody! Let's clear the scene.” He called as he backed up, everyone but Will following him.

Will took a deep breath, and let the pendulum swing.

I planned this moment- this monument- with precision. Collected all my raw materials in advance. (Most of it is meaningless fodder, most didn’t deserve these deaths-)

I position the bodies carefully, according each its rightful place. Peace in the pieces disassembled. (No sustenance, random choice, weak-)

My latest victim I save for last. I want him to watch me work. I want him to know my design.

Your death is my crowning glory. This is my resume. My body of work. (Meaningless accomplishments vanishing in history, padded much like an actual resume, only the beginning and end actually matter, are actually of worth to-)

"Will?"

Will came to quickly, realizing that he wasn't on the beach.

"I wasn't expecting you. Are you alright?"

Will looked around Hannibal's waiting room, starting to panic.

"I'm, I was on a beach-"

"Will? What are you talking about?" Hannibal stepped forward, reaching for him but stopping. "Can I touch you?"

Will nodded his consent, and Hannibal gently grabbed both his arms. "I don't know how I got here."

"Calm down Will, can you do that for me?"

Will took a couple deep breathes, reaching back for-

"Where is Phantom? Where's Winston?" Will spun around, looking for the two dogs.

"Let's check outside. Your car may be there."

Will nodded shakily, following Hannibal out to the street, where Will's Volvo was parked and the dogs were sitting inside.

Will rushed forward, opening the backdoor and letting both of the distressed dogs out. Phantom hugged Will, standing on the seat of the car, and Winston whined loudly at his side. They were both spooked.

"So we know you drove here. Where were you before?"

"I was on a beach in Grafton, West Virginia- I blinked and then I was in your waiting room."

Hannibal nodded, taking Will's arm and pulling him gently away from the car, locking it up and walking back inside.

"Grafton, West Virginia is three-and-a-half hours from here." Hannibal closed the waiting room door, leading Will to sit down at his desk. "You've lost time."

Will took a breath as Hannibal checked his temperature with his hand, then he shrugged off his jacket. "Th-There is something wrong with me." Will felt himself twitching wildly, restless and panicked.

“You’re dissociating, Will. It’s a desperate survival mechanism for a psyche that endures repeated abuse.”

Will scoffed, getting up and side-stepping Hannibal. “No, no, I’m not abused!”

“You have an empathy disorder. What you feel is overwhelming you-”

“I know- I *know*- ”

“Yet you choose to ignore it. That is the abuse I’m referring to.” He kept his voice calm and steady, and Will wanted to scream.

“We’ve been over this Hannibal- I can’t quit!”

“You could. You could walk away from Jack.” Hannibal insisted.

“He needs me-”

“To do his job for him?”

“That's not who I’m-” Will bit his tongue. He needed to stay on this job to keep Hannibal safe. He couldn’t spill that without spilling everything. Will took a breath, putting his head in his hands. “I’m sorry for yelling.”

“I worry about you, Will.” Will could feel that.

“I’m doing good Hannibal. I save lives working for the bureau.”

“And that feels good.”

“Generally speaking, yeah.” *You’d disagree.*

“What about your life?” Will looked up, a bit shocked. “I’m your partner, Will. I don’t care about the lives you save. I care about your life. And your life is separating from reality. Ask any of your friends, they’ll say the same thing. I know Beverly wants you out.”

Will took a few deep breaths, sitting down on the chaise. “I’ve been sleepwalking. I’m experiencing hallucinations.” But he’s been doing this a long time-in the past this wasn’t the way his mind deteriorated. “Maybe I should get a brain scan.”

“I’d support that, but I’d have to also say you’re working would be accelerating any physical ailments as well.”

“Looking at dead bodies doesn’t grow tumors.” he snapped.

Hannibal clicked his tongue. “You were at a crime scene when you disassociated. Tell me about it.”

“It was a totem pole of bodies.”

“In some cultures, crimes and guilt are made manifest so that everyone can see them and see their shame.”

Will shook his head. “No, this isn’t shame. It’s celebration. He’s marking his achievements.”

“And faced with this killer’s achievements, your mind needed to escape and you lost time.”

“I guess.” Winston whined, pushing into the back of his leg.

“I’m worried about you, Will.” He could feel it. It was soaking the air, between the dogs and Hannibal, Will couldn’t focus on much else. “You empathize so completely with the killers Jack Crawford has your mind wrapped around that you lose yourself to them. What if you lose time and hurt yourself? Or someone else? I don’t want you to wake up and see a totem of your own making.”

Will bit his tongue to keep from laughing. Hannibal wanted him to be fully awake for that.

“I believe that these circumstances will allow me to pull you from this case?” Will looked up in shock.

“No, this- this is too big, this is a killer who has committed so *many*- they need me. They can’t do this on their own-”

“They will have to make due.”

Will deliberated a moment, before nodding. “I’ll go tell Jack then.” He turned, whistling once for his dogs and making his way towards the exit.

“Will?” Will sighed, and then turned to face Hannibal, keeping his eyes low. “I love you.”

Will felt a smile twitch on his face. “Love you too.”

—

“I’m sorry about yesterday.” Will started, sure that if he couldn’t remember something then he probably did something odd.

“Sorry about what?” Or Jack was dense and couldn’t tell if Will had something seriously wrong with him- that made him sure of his safety and mental wellbeing.

“I wasn’t feeling like myself.

“Not feeling like yourself- that's kinda what you do, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so.” Will looked to the side. “Did I really seem fine to you?” Will questioned. He began to deliberate calling Beverly or someone who actually paid attention to his mental state

to figure out what happened.

“Something you want to tell me?”

Will had to stay on this case. “No, no.”

“Well clearly there’s something you don’t want to tell me.”

“I guess I just got a little lost yesterday, I’m fine now.”

“Are you sure? Beverly has been sticking with you? I didn’t see her go with you yesterday.”

“It got to me. All those bodies got to me. I thought it was more obvious than it was. I needed some time alone.”

“You can’t be having ‘alone time’ Will.” Will rolled his eyes- he wasn’t in any danger at all. “If there’s a problem, you need to tell me. And let me help you. Is there a problem, Will?”

Will gave a bitter smile. “Everything’s fine, Jack.”

Now to hope he didn’t double check with Doctor Lecter before Will could solve the case.

___

“How many bodies?”

“We got seventeen in total.” Brian stated, motioning to one laid out flat.

“Meet our freshest one” Jimmy waggled his eyebrows, pulling back the sheet. “Joel Summers. Forty years old, runs a cell phone store in Knoxville, Tennessee. Or did. Been missing for three days.”

“Single stab wound to the heart. All the other injuries are post mortem- bones broken, hips and shoulders dislocated.”

“He was special to him somehow. He held a place of honor.”

“Seven bodies from unmarked graves at the crime scene - earth on the body parts matches the grave sites.”

“Blunt force trauma, stabbings, strangulations. Wrongful deaths.” Brian clarified.

“There are at least eight other bodies that are recent grave robbings from all across West Virginia. No crimes attributed to any of them. Accidental deaths.” Beverly motioned to some of the other bodies.

Will shook his head. “They’re all murders.”

“Well, that tells us all we need to know for now. Good job.”

“Go on, skedaddle home.”

Will looked oddly between Jimmy and Brian. “Excuse me?”

“We’re worried, Will. You were kinda distant yesterday.” Beverly spoke, moving to stand beside him.

“Plus there's the odd fact most of our heart to hearts happen over dead bodies. With how this stuff affects us-”

“We can’t imagine how bad it's getting to you.” Brian finished for Jimmy.

“So we’re sending you home for today.” Beverly smiled at him, snapping off one of her gloves to rub a hand over his back.

“And- what exactly should I do at home instead of working here?”

The three fumbled for a moment, deliberating.

Jimmy snapped his fingers suddenly. “You ever played DnD?”

“Uhm, no-”

“Make a character! Make sure to read the handbook over thoroughly- 5e- and then I can run a campaign for us!”

“Yeah! That's fun, and lighthearted! No stress!” Beverly agreed, guiding him out of the lab.

“Be safe! Bye!” He heard Brian call, and then the door was shut behind him. Phantom yawned from where he lay outside the door, standing and greeting him with a wagging tail.

He watched Beverly replace her glove, and go back to work around the table. Maybe he should quit.

As he began walking out he realized that Beverly hadn’t made an effort to keep him company all the time. She didn’t seem too worried about the Ripper either.

That was odd.

—

“Every death is different. Made to look like something else. No sadism, no torture. The method of these murders was less important to the killer than the simple fact that these people die.” Will spoke, flicking through the slideshow of the case for the class.

“Joel Summers - killed by a single stab to the heart. Presented with great ostentation atop a display of all the previous victims. This killer’s design was to never be discovered. A ghost.

That is what excited him. Until now... Why is he coming into the light?"

Phantom barked. "Will?" Alana's voice. "I thought you quit teaching."

He looked around, seeing no students. No slides. Just him and his dogs, sitting in a dark room while he talked. "No. No... I mean yeah. It's a-a mental exercise."

"Very moody in here." She said as she stepping inside, keeping her distance.

"That's me all over." He looked at the distance, and sighed. "Come on in. I promise I don't bite."

"A doctor who treats herself has a fool for a patient. I regretted leaving your house the other night. I should have stayed to comfort you. At least driven you to Hannibal's."

"I made it to Doctor Lecter's just fine."

"Any more… issues?" She asked, stepping closer to rub his arm gently.

Yes actually, you interrupted me right in the middle of an 'issue'. "No, no. I'm fine."

"I have feelings for you, Will. But I don't want to just have an affair with you. It would be reckless."

"I don't…" he sighed. "I don't have those kind of feelings for you Alana."

"Oh- I thought you-"

"I did. Just… not anymore." He furrowed his brows. "Why would it be reckless? It's not because you have a 'professional curiosity' about me."

"No, it's because I think you're unstable." She looked off to the side at where Winston slept. "Do you feel unstable?" He stared at her a moment, then slowly nodded.

She hugged him gently.

"I'm here for you Will. No matter what."

—

"Jack called me." Was how their conversation started. Will sat in the passenger seat of the bentley, him and Hannibal going to visit Abigail.

Will sighed. "Did he?"

"He says that you aren't taking care of yourself- you didn't tell him about my suggestion to remove yourself from the case, and apparently think a handgun and your dogs sufficient to

keep you safe when *Jack* has ordered you be with someone at all times."

"I'm not going to have a guard on me until the Ripper is caught- that could take years. We might never catch him."

"Jack expressing his concern worries me more than anything." Will snorted. "He has been dealing with the Ripper for a long time. If he decides that you need a guard, I wholeheartedly agree with him."

Will rubbed his temples. "Beverly is living with me. At the FBI headquarters I really doubt anything is going to happen, and i have her or you with me when I go other places."

"Will-"

"Besides, Phantom isn't exactly a small dog-"

"Will this isn't the topic I wanted to address," Will fell silent, looking at Hannibal expectantly. "I am more concerned about your blatant disregard for your mental health on this case."

Will bit his tongue and looked away.

"Alana told me about your discussion in your old lecture hall."

"Son of a bitch…" Will cursed under his breath, digging the heels of his palms into his eyes.

Hannibal sighed. "Will, I do not understand why you are so intent on pretending nothing is wrong."

"No, I know something is wrong-"

"Then why don't you try and take care of yourself?"

"Fine. I won't come in on this case anymore."

Will felt Hannibal take his hand, squeezing it reassuringly. "I don't want to fight with you. I also do not want to see you suffer."

"I know. I just…"

"You never need to justify yourself to me Will. This is important to you. But it needs to be moderated." He ran his thumb over the back of Will's hand. "Let me moderate."

"Okay. I'm sorry. You were right. I'll drop the case."

"Thank you."

Will stared out the window of the bentley and wondered how much longer it would be before he was too unstable to not be locked up.

___

“I’m trying hard to be understated when I say this is a bad idea.” Will said, looking down at Abigail.

“Freddie Lounds is dangerous.” Hannibal stated as he looked at some of the plants in the room, wanting more to watch how Will dealt with Abigail. It was hard to get him to drop this last case, but Hannibal knew it to be a necessity if he wanted to keep both of his paths open. Will was believing this to be mental illness, and to fight that he tried to keep everything as it was, pretend he could still do his work. It was a state of denial.

“She said she wants me to write about you guys in the book.”

“You would be forfeiting your privacy and ours.” He reasoned. If Abigail got her facts wrong in the book it could jeopardize both of them. Most likely would.

“This. All of this will change. Whatever you’re feeling now, that won’t last. Things change. Things are changing for me, too.” Will looked him in the eye, and the began to walk towards where Abigail was seated. “ I’m doing some accounting for what’s important in my life and what isn’t. You’re important, Abigail.”

“Just because you killed my dad doesn’t mean you get to be him.” Abigail snapped, crossing her arms, and he saw Will flinch.

“Abigail. We’ve been through a traumatic event, no one more traumatized than you, Abigail. But we went through it together. What you write you write about all of us.”

“I don’t need your permission.” She stood up.

“And you don’t need our approval. But I hope it would mean something.” He said softly, hoping to get her to open up and listen rather than fight with them.

“I know what people think I did. They’re wrong. Why can’t I tell everybody they’re wrong?”

Will features softened and he started to step around the table. “You have nothing to apologize for-”

“Yet.” He interrupted. Will looked alarmed. “But if you open this door, Abigail, you won’t control what comes through. Are you ready for that?”

They held each other's gaze for a while, and Hannibal could practically hear the gears turning in Will’s head. He hoped Abigail would catch on before him though. It would be tedious to explain.

As they left, arm in arm as usual, the small of encephalitis was unmistakable in it's sweetness as it slowly boiled Will’s brain. He would have to come to a decision soon.

—

Will read the PDF Jimmy texted to him earlier in the week, and snorted. Of course he'd be into this kind of nerdy stuff. It was a lot to read however, and he understood why they chose this to keep him busy.

Bear let out a high pitched bark and whine, and he knew he needed to let her out to pee. He sighed, setting his laptop down and opening the back door for the puppy. She really was cute, and pretty well trained already at around four months. He wondered where the Peta people got her. Wondered if there was some family out there missing her. Wondered how to ask Hannibal without arousing suspicion.

He opened his laptop again, and got a microchip reader off of Amazon before googling about missing dogs. Nothing.

She looked purebred, at the very least. The only pyrenees breeder he could find was indeed in Maryland, and had recently had one of their mothers stolen with her liter of six. It fit.

He wondered what happened to the rest of her family-

Beverly came in the front door, and Will quickly closed the tabs on the dog. He continued reading the absurdly long player's handbook, and Beverly came to sit by him as Bear came tumbling in with Phantom.

"Ugh, this case is hellish." Beverly complained loudly as she slumped across his couch. She spread out like a starfish, resting her head on his shoulder. "I can't believe Jack is still so convinced I should follow you around everywhere- he sent me home early after scolding me for leaving you alone."

"I don't think I am in any danger from the Ripper."

"Neither do I."

"It would be rude to uproot me from my current life like that."

Beverly snorted. "He has manners? Really?"

"I would take a guess it's the only common denominator between his victims." He joked.

Her brows furrowed. She sat up. "You're right."

"What?"

"If that's how he's choosing his victims, then that makes so much sense! We were trying to find a pattern where one couldn't be discerned from written files. Anyone can be rude. It's genius- no traceable motive, but ample supply of victims."

"But he couldn't keep up with every single one. Not without leading us back to him. So he has a catalogue, a way of keeping track with enough details he can easily find them again."

“And then he selects from the list entirety at random. Keeping himself removed as a possible suspect!”

Will swallowed, having just realized he revealed possibly a huge clue of the case to Beverly while he figured it out himself. *Fuck.*

“I’m calling Jack. Maybe then he’ll let you be alone.”

“It's only a theory, not enough to really base anything on.”

“It may be. He reacted to Gideon’s plagiarism because it was rude, it's rude to abuse animals, Miriam Lass was an FBI trainee who probably, was very polite when she interviewed him. That’s why he didn’t humiliate her!”

"She also just impressed him. She found him."

"We're finding him." Beverly's smile dropped. "Don't worry about me Will. He won't get me."

Will started to panic. If Beverly figured it out, he wouldn’t have a choice. He’d have to keep his cool and lead her away slowly.

But she would catch that. He watched her talk to Jack on the phone, explaining their theory, and felt a pit of dread in his stomach.

Then it clicked.

“Motive.”

“I’m sorry Jack- What Will?” She asked, holding the phone to her collarbone.

“Do you have the case file for the totem pole?”

She nodded, and continued to talk to Jack as she laid out the file.

“It's safe to assume, if this is a monument to his accomplishments, then Joel Summers is his last kill.”

“Yeah…” She said, putting Jack on speaker.

“Then this body at the bottom would be his first.”

“It is the oldest body- Fletcher Marshall. Murdered in 1973. Beaten to death right in Grafton. His grave was robbed five days ago.”

“No-one convicted of killing him?”

“Nope.”

“Our killer got away with it forty years ago.”

“So he kept at it.” Jack’s voice came through the phone. Will looked at the pictures of the bodies.

“There will be a connection between Joel Summers and Fletcher Marshall. These are the only two kills with a motive.”

“Well done Will. Please excuse me for a moment.” Jack’s voice came through the speaker, and then they were put on hold.

“So this mean you’re feeling better?” Beverly asked, a tender smile on her face.

Will winced. “I’m losing time, forgetting things- Hallucinating. Sleepwalking too.”

“Sounds pretty serious.”

“Will?” Jacks voice rang through the phone. “Nicholas Boyle turned up dead in Minnesota.”

___

Will was already waiting in Jack’s office when Alana and Hannibal arrived.

“Nicholas Boyle turned up in Minnesota- dead. His body was found in the woods. He was frozen. They thawed him out pretty quickly but they said they can’t say if he died a week ago or six weeks ago or the night he disappeared.”

Will felt the room. Shock. Concern. Hannibal’s was differently sourced- they discovered a body he had a hand in making. But he normally wasn’t too worried, why would he be now?

“How did he die?”

“Knife wound. He’d been gutted.” Hannibal was scared. “I’ve had the body flown down here. I want Abigail Hobbs to identify it.”

“You already have a positive i.d.”

“Not from Abigail Hobbs.” Because *that* wouldn’t scar her for life.

“You can’t put her in a room with Nick Boyle’s body. She already has nightmares about him.” Alana protested, and Will nodded along with her statement.

“I’m curious about why.”

Will scoffed. “You can’t think she had something to do with this?”

“I think she’s the common denominator between her father, Marissa Schuur, Nick Boyle. They all go back to Abigail. My instinct is she’s still got answers that we haven’t heard.” His

voice started to raise, and Winston whined. If Jack knew the truth about what happened with her father, he wouldn't be able to protect her. Neither of them would.

"What are the questions, Jack?"

"Let's start with where she goes when she climbs the walls at the psychiatric facility. Maybe she was meeting Nick Boyle. None of us know what was really between them."

The air in the room was thick with toxic emotions. Even Alana was close to losing her temper. "I want to be on record as saying this is a very bad idea." Alana stated. "Hannibal?"

"Jack has the look of a man with no interest in any opinion but his own."

"I'd like you to observe on this Alana."

Will knew one of them should be there to cover her- him or Hannibal. But Jack didn't want that. "If you're putting Abigail in a room with the body, I want to be there."

"I'm sorry Will. I am not confident in your ability to be objective about Abigail Hobbs right now." Will looked to Hannibal, to get him to step in. He did nothing. "Alana." Jack called, and then they left the room. Will huffed.

"He could do Abigail irreparable damage, exposing her to this. God knows he doesn't mind causing emotional trauma to me."

"Perhaps she's stronger than we think."

___

"Joel Summers, the headpiece of our totem pole, was adopted after his parents died. Guess who dad was?" Beverly's voice rang clear through the room as she stormed in, flopping on his bed at a very late hour and waking Will up from where he had just managed to fall asleep a half-hour earlier.

"Who?"

"Fletcher Marshall. Joel Summers is Joel Marshall."

___

"We did a DNA comparison between Fletcher Marshall and Joel Summers." Jimmy stated as Beverly walked in with Will, still half asleep. "No match."

"So it wasn't his son? Why am I here? I thought Doctor's orders prohibited me."

“The mother, Eleanor Marshall, died in a car accident four years after Fletcher was killed.” Brian said, motioning around the diagram in the lab. “We wanted to just, bring you in, show you stuff…”

“We miss you around here Will. And we wanted to show you that Jack is the one leaning and pressuring you, we’re perfectly capable of doing our jobs.” Jimmy stated.

Will smiled. “Don’t let him hear you say that. Was this a genuine accident?”

“If she was murdered, she would be on the Totem Pole.” Beverly stated.

“Unless he loved her too much to disgrace her that way. Was anyone convicted for Fletcher Marshall’s murder?” Will asked.

“A man named Laurence Wells was questioned twice in 1973. Never charged and still lives in Grafton.”

“Fletcher Marshall was a crime of passion. It had something none of the other murders had. Motive.” He started ruffling through the papers in front of him, looking for patterns in the words. Bingo. “Fletcher Marshall wasn’t but is Laurence Wells colorblind?” He asked. “Joel Marshall had anomalous trichromacy. Color blind in the green retinal receptors.”

“It's hereditary.” Brian smiled.

“We found our motive!”

Will smiled. “Promise not to tell anyone I was here?” The three nodded and winked. “I’ll see you all Saturday.”

They waved as Beverly called Jack, and Will started to walk out of the building with his dogs, sure Beverly would get a ride home with one of the boys.

He stopped at the entrance to the morgue, and told his dogs to stay. He had something too see.

Will walked into the cold room, where Nick Boyle was still laid out. Jack had left in a hurry. Will needed to see for himself. He revealed the body, looked at the pale thawed flesh, closed his eyes, and let the pendulum swing.

Nick got up. He was killed the night he attacked Abigail- was wearing those clothes. He was hurt- Will stabbed him, saw the knife-

He was being stabbed. He looked up to Abigail’s horrified face, and it clicked.

Hannibal didn’t kill Nicholas Boyle. He had only helped to hide the body. Will was… disappointed. He had hoped Abigail’s first solo kill would have been her choice, something that he and Hannibal had helped her prepare to do-

Will jolted his head from those thoughts, breathing heavily. He didn’t know why he should be surprised anymore- except for the fact that the future he wanted would never happen if his

mind kept going down the gutter at the same rate Abigail was being pursued by Jack. At least now he knew the truth he could help to hide it.

___

Will didn't bother knocking, or giving a warning as he stepped into Hannibal's office, dogs in tow. The doctor was at his desk, a drawing in front of him, and Will sighed.

"Hello Will." Out with the truth then.

"Abigail Hobbs killed Nick Boyle."

Shock, quickly hidden. Apprehension, sorrow. "Yes, I know."

Will nodded, a harsh laugh coming out of his throat. "Tell me why you know?" He waited to hear the facts he already knew in bitter silence. If Hannibal didn't trust him with Abigail's safety, there was no way in hell he'd trust Will with his in the near future.

"I helped her dispose of the body."

"Evidently not well enough." Will spoke, stalking towards Hannibal's desk to lean over it, holding eye contact.

"Have you told Jack Crawford?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why would I?" Will fired back. Hannibal was stunned into silence. "Tell me the truth."

"Everything you know about that night is true. Except the end. Nicholas Boyle attacked us. Abigail's only crime was to defend herself and I lied about it."

"Good."

"Good?"

"You knew how Jack would react. You protected her." Will sighed, turning away and walking to stare out one of the windows, and dangled his bait. "I only wish you would have trusted me to do the same."

"I am sorry. I didn't know you as well then as I do now. I wasn't sure if you would tell Jack and he would hang her for what her father's done. The world would burn Abigail in his place. That would be the story. That would be what Freddie Lounds writes." Hannibal stood, crossing past his desk. "I trust you now Will. Who knows Abigail better than you and I? Or

the burden she bears? We are her fathers now. We have to serve her better than Garret Jacob Hobbs."

"If this gets out to Jack…"

"Abigail doesn't have a future. If she is ever to have the life she deserves, then we have to tell no one."

"I understand that." Will looked Hannibal in the eyes, barley containing his laughter when he spoke. "No more secrets?"

"I will not say that I have never lied to you Will. Only that I have done what was best."

Will nodded. He could have pointed out the dodgy answer. Or the arrogant tone of the words. "I trust you."

Hannibal smiled softly at him, and Will put his head on Hannibal's shoulder, leaning into him and closing his eyes. He felt and heard Hannibal burrowing his nose in his hair to smell him again. He could feel the storm brewing beneath Hannibal's skin, how torn he was about Will. He was definitely forming a plan, but Will couldn't place what it was.

—

Will sat across the dining room table from Freddie Lounds, Abigail sat beside her. He glared daggers at Freddie, not very happy that she was there with them.

"I feel terrible, Miss Lounds. Never entered my head you might be a vegetarian. A lapse on my behalf." Will didn't blink or break his gaze, wishing she wasn't so he could privately laugh as she ate questionable meats. Will had (mostly) gotten over that bit, it wasn't as if *not* eating it would bring them back to life, so what was the harm.

"Research always delivers benefits."

"And if it contradicts a good story, hell, just publish it anyway?" Will snapped, continuing his unfaltering glare.

"Are you still angry because I called you insane? The libel laws are clear, Mr. Graham."

"Insinuation is such a grey area." He said, taking a bite and imagining it was Freddie he was eating.

"Insane isn't really black and white, is it? We're all pathological in our own ways."

"You decide on the version of the truth that suits you and then pursue it pathologically." It was rude to bicker like this over dinner, but if he was lucky Hannibal would blame Freddie.

“Everybody decides their our own versions of the truth. I’m here because I want to tell Abigail’s version of the truth.”

“See that you do.” He said, a threat clear under the words. He could easily make some vague threat about getting the Ripper to kill her, but then she would find out about the Ripper’s obsession with him, which may match the Ripper to Hannibal’s profile. He decided to keep his mouth shut.

“I don’t have anything to hide.” She smiled.

“Everybody has something to hide, but I’m not going to write about anything you don’t want me to.” Will snorted, but he covered it with a cough. Hannibal gave him a look.

“You must understand our concerns. We care about Abigail. Our only thought is to protect her.” Will nodded, meeting Freddie’s gaze.

“She’s already exposed. Her silence until now has been taken as guilt. This book is about her innocence. I want Abigail to have a future.”

“That’s what we all want.” Will said, smiling.

“Then we aren’t so different after all, Mr. Graham.”

“We all want what’s best for Abigail.” Hannibal smiled.

“This is possibly the finest salad I’ve ever eaten in my life. Shame to ruin it with all that meat.” Will tried not to laugh again, hiding a smile behind his napkin.

—

Will was helping to clean up, drying dishes next to Abigail. She was terrified, her hands trembling as she held the glass, shaking so much he was afraid she may drop it.

He sighed. “It's okay Abigail. I know.”

“What?”

“He figured out you killed Nicholas Boyle, Abigail.”

She started breathing heavily, looking up at him. “It's okay.” He said, smiling. “We’ll keep you safe.” He gently took the glass from her hands, and set it on the counter with the others.

She looked to Hannibal, and he also smiled reassuringly, and she calmed. Will could feel relief from her, as she looked up at him. A newfound bond. They were slowly coming together as a family.

“You’re free Abigail, no one will know what you did.” Hannibal came to stand on her other side, holding another dishtowel. “And no one will know what you cannot admit. Even to yourself.”

Abigail, leaned on the counter, hiding her face. Small sobs started up, and then full tears as they fell on the counter.

“I helped him.” She said softly, and Will gently rubbed a hand up and down her back. He could feel the minor shock from Hannibal at his lack of reaction, but Will knew she needed support instead of disappointment at the confirmation of his beliefs. “I helped him.” She said again, stronger. “I knew what my father was I knew what he did. I-I knew. I was the one who met the girls, talked to them. Laughed and joked. Found out where they lived, where they were going- when they’d be alone. Girls that looked just like me.” Phantom came trotting into the kitchen, letting out a whine. Winston stood behind him, ears at attention, head tilted. They were worried. “They could have been my *friends*. I couldn’t say no to him. I *knew*... I knew it was them or me.”

The words hung in the air for a moment, in silence. Then Will moved forward with Hannibal to hold her. She started crying, and he felt her clutch to both of them like a lifeline.

“I wondered when you would tell me.” Hannibal broke the silence.

“I’m a monster.”

“You’re a survivor.” Will reassured. He pulled away to look her in the eye. “You aren’t responsible for what happened Abigail. You couldn’t control your father’s actions- couldn’t expect to. You did what you had to do to survive. That isn’t a bad thing.”

“I know what monsters are. You’re a victim.” Abigail let out another sob, quietly. “And Will and I? We’re going to protect you.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry this chapter took so long to come out after final's, I've been off my anti-depressants for six weeks because I haven't been able to get any more and its been pretty hard to write. This has barley been edited but I know I have to keep going in order to keep with this story at all. Corrections are welcome.

Buffet Froid

Chapter Summary

The plot thickens

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter is kinda short, wasn't much to do with this episode :p

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’d like you to draw a clock face. Numbered. Large hand indicating the hour, small hand the minute.”

Hannibal had been strangely distant during their session. Usually they just chatted, sometimes it strayed to heavier topics but for the most part it was just them, being comfortable with each other.

Will really didn’t like the feelings he was getting off him today. The silence. Every once and again he’d say something, but it was never on any topics that were pleasant. Always what was wrong with him. How badly he was doing.

“Why?”

“An exercise. Nothing more. I want you to remember a present moment. The now. Often as you can, think of who you are and when.” A preventative in case he lost time again. Lost himself again.

“It’s Seven Sixteen PM.” Will said as he drew the clock, sarcasm heavy in his tone. He didn’t see the point in this. “I’m in Baltimore, Maryland, and my name is Will Graham.” He finished, handing it over to Hannibal.

Will’s stomach dropped with Hannibal’s, and he felt thrown for a moment as Hannibal had such a reaction to whatever was on the page. Then he couldn’t get anything. Every crack, every little dent that had appeared in the suit since Will met Hannibal, painstakingly placed and coaxed out by him in an effort to be intimate, was all gone.

Will started to panic.

“A simple reminder. A handle to reality for you to hold onto.” He closed the book, the snap of the pages hitting each other sounding like the crack of a spine. Will winced, trying to hide

his fear. “And know you are alive.”

Will watched Hannibal set the notebook in a drawer behind his desk, under lock and key. He swallowed, feeling like he just signed his own death warrant.

___

Will came inside the back door with his catch, dogs lumbering happily at his heels. Phantom kept talking to him the entire way there, the dog having been spooked by something. Winston seemed a little distressed as well, but Will knew they were probably just feeding off his nerves.

He took the proper knife, sliding it into the belly of the fish and starting to cut, blood pooling across the cutting board, until it was covered- there was *way too much-*

He was on a woman, a knife in his hand, her face was split in half- she was sputtering, *bleeding-*

Will rushed outside, up to his harms in blood, hyperventilating as he saw his friends and Jack crawford standing outside, concern covering their faces.

“Will?”

___

Beverly helped him wash the blood off his hands, gentle in her touch. Phantom and Winston sat at his heels, whining and distressed.

Jack was talking was Jimmy and Brian about something, and Beverly leaned in close.

“What was that?”

“I… I was in my house. I was gutting a fish a-and then I was cutting that poor woman's face open.”

“It doesn’t look like you made any new cuts on the body. Should I call Doctor Lecter?”

Will managed to shake his head, still pretty freaked out.

“Alright. Make sure to let him know though, okay? I’m gonna talk to Jack. I think this stuff is getting to be too much for you.”

“Bev, I don’t-”

“I know you don’t want to stop for whatever dumb reason you’ve got in your head. Maybe you don’t want to admit there’s something wrong that you can’t fix. Maybe you don’t want to let down Jack or us. Maybe you wanna prove your worth. I don’t care- whatever it is, it's not worth this.” She motioned to his hands, still bloody. “My sister wanted to be a model. But every time the camera would flash she would get overstimulated and break down.” Beverly smiled, fondly. “This isn’t much different, at it's core.”

Will started to chuckle. Then he was laughing outright, full body giggleing that made him double over to catch his breath.

“There something funny?” Jack asked, looking over.

“I hardly think this and *modeling* are at their core, the same.” Will said by way of explanation, and Jimmy snorted.

“I don’t know, we have a photographer for the body, they need a photographer for their bodies…” He jokingly weighed both things, nodding at Brian.

Jack turned suddenly and stormed out of the room, looking very upset.

Will sighed, “Wish me luck guys.” And walked out after him.

“What happened in there?”

“I got confused.”

“I’ve seen you confused and I’ve seen you upset, but I’ve never seen you afraid like this.”

Will scoffed, hiding the fact that Jack was right. “I’m an old hand at fear. I can manage this one. I was just disoriented. I can go back in.”

“I saw your face when you came out of that room. What did you see in there that's got you mute all of a sudden?.”

“I can see and hear better afraid- I-I just can’t speak as concisely.”

“Will. You contaminated the crime scene. You’ve never done that before.” There was actual concern in his voice, and it broke Will’s resolve.

“I thought I was responsible for it.” Will distantly heard his voice break, the admission that maybe he didn’t have as much of a handle on this as he thought he did scaring him. The worse he got, the more Hannibal was pulling away, distancing himself. Will didn’t want to know what he would do once he considered himself distant enough.

“What are you saying? You thought you killed that woman in there?” Jack was really concerned now.

“Sometimes with what I do-”

“What you *do* is take all the evidence available at a crime scene. You extrapolate. You reconstruct the thinking of a killer. You don’t think of yourself as the killer.” Will held back his urge to laugh. He knew that.

“I got lost in the reconstruction. Just for a second. Just a blink.”

“I know you don’t like to be a subject of concern, but I am officially concerned about you.” Jack stated.

“Officially?” Will felt the word roll of his tongue bitterly.

“That’s right.”

“Thought the reason you have me seeing Dr. Lecter and not an FBI psychiatrist is so my mental wellbeing stays *unofficial* .” Will chose his words carefully, their expected bite hitting their mark with practiced ease.

“I just want to be careful with you. We don’t want to break you here.” Will couldn’t stop his harsh laugh. “Is that what’s happening? Have I broken you?”

“Do you have anyone that does this better unbroken than I do broken?”

“Fear makes you rude, Will. Go home.” Jack walked past him, up and into the house, and Will bit his tongue. Second case he was removed from because of this. He hoped to god it was treatable.

—

“I still have the coppery smell of blood on my hands. I can’t remember seeing the crime scene before I saw myself killing her.” Will rubbed his hands over his face, pacing around Hannibal’s office. Hannibal sat at his desk watching him- a professional distance between them. It stung deeper than Will would have liked to admit.

“Those memories sank out of sight, yet you’re aware of their absence.”

“There’s a grandiosity in the violence I imagined that feels more real than what I know is true.”

“What do you know to be true?”

“I know I didn’t kill her. Couldn’t have. But I remember cutting into her. I remember watching her die.”

“You must overcome these delusions that are disguising your reality.” Will felt like he was drowning, Hannibal was saying these things and leaving him out in open water. He rested his

forearms on the ladder in Hannibal's office, hiding his face. "What savage delusions does this killer have?"

"It wasn't savage. It was lonely... desperate... sad." Will turned, sitting on one of the rungs. "I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I looked through me, past me. Like I was a stranger."

"You have to honestly confront your limitations with what you do and how it affects you." Hannibal said, finally getting up and coming over to him.

"If by limitations you mean the difference between sanity and insanity... I don't accept that."

"What do you accept?"

"I know what kind of crazy I am and this is *not* that kind of crazy." He held eye contact, looking for anything from Hannibal. "This could be seizures. This could be a tumor. A blood clot-"

"I can recommend a neurologist." Hannibal turned away, just as Will saw a pained look overcome his features. "But if it isn't physiological, then you have to accept what you're struggling with is mental illness."

Will watched as he turned, making a few phone calls to a man named Doctor Sutcliffe, before grabbing his coat and taking Will to a hospital.

___

Hannibal didn't like how quickly this choice was coming up. Will was too persistent, knew his mind too well. He had wanted another week to see if Will started showing any subconscious signs that he may be more okay with what Hannibal did then he let on, but as it was now he didn't know if Will would turn him in or help him.

If he cured the encephalitis and Will wasn't in the right mindset, then he would spend the rest of his days in a cell in the BSHCI. If he didn't and Will *was,* then Will might decide to turn on him anyway.

If he ever figured out that Hannibal was pushing him.

"You're in very good hands. Dr. Lecter is the sanest man I know."

"I would agree." Hannibal let himself smile. "Dr. Sutcliffe and I were residents together at Hopkins."

"Another life ago. When you didn't mind getting your hands dirty." Hannibal never liked Doctor Sutcliffe.

“I was always drawn to how the mind works. I found it much more dynamic than how the brain works.”

“The projected image is more interesting than the projector until the projector breaks down.” Hannibal couldn’t wait to kill him. “So, Will, these headaches. When did they begin, in earnest?”

“Two to three months ago.” He spoke, a timid edge to his voice. He was nervous, the dogs at his feet picking that up and whining loudly.

“About the time Will went back into the field, which is when I met him.” Hannibal elaborated.

“And the hallucinations?”

“I can’t really say when they started. I just slowly became aware that I might not be dreaming.”

He nodded. “You can leave your dogs in my office. We’ll get you in right away.”

___

“It’s encephalitis.” Hannibal said, watching Will get situated into the MRI machine. He had a clear course of action now, how he would handle Will and Doctor Sutcliffe would make or break that plan. Position the Doctor to be dead, and alienate Will from everyone. Will, hopefully, would end up in the BSHCI without any knowledge of what Hannibal was, and only have Hannibal there as his rock. Fostering codependency until Will wouldn’t be able to function in the free world without him.

“That’s your pre-diagnosis?”

“Yes.”

“Based on?”

“I could smell it.”

“So your sense of smell has gone from calling out a nurse’s perfume to diagnosing autoimmune disease.” The sarcasm dripped heavy from his words, and Hannibal felt a slight tang of regret that he would not be able to eat the Doctor.

“He started sleepwalking and I noticed a very specific scent.”

“And what does encephalitis smell like?”

“It has heat. A fevered sweetness.”

“If you suspected, why didn’t you say something?”

“Had to be sure. Symptoms began slow and gradually worsened. Yesterday, I asked him to draw a clock. This is what he drew.” Hannibal took out the skewed drawing, numbers falling outside of the line.

“Spatial neglect. Headaches, disorientation, hallucinations, altered consciousness. It’s all the tell-tales.”

Hannibal weighed his next words, knowing exactly how to appeal to Sutcliffe- it’s why he chose him, and not one of his more honorable associates. “It’s so rare to be able to study the psychological effect of this type of malady on a person’s mind.”

“More rare still to study the neurological effects.” He responded, and Hannibal knew he had taken the bait. He would keep his mouth shut.

“A doctor has to weigh the ultimate benefit of scientific study. Even in these times, we know so little about the brain. There are great discoveries to be made.”

As if he would *ever* use Will as a guinea pig.

“The entire right side of his brain is completely inflamed. It’s Anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis. Symptoms are going to get a lot worse.”

“I know. It’s unfortunate for Will.”

“What do you smell on me?”

Hannibal smiled. “Opportunity.”

—

“We didn’t find anything abnormal. No vascular malformations, no tumors. No swelling or bleeding. No evidence of stroke. Nothing. There is nothing wrong with you neurologically.”

Will felt himself go white as a sheet. He was screwed. His mind was decaying and there was no way to scramble back up the side of the cliff he as falling off.

“Usually when I tell a patient that, they’re happy to hear it.”

“So... what I’m experiencing is psychological?” Will heard his voice break, looking at the clean brain scan.

“Brain scans can’t diagnose a mental disorder. They can only rule out medical illnesses, like a tumor, that can cause similar symptoms.” Will took a shaking breath, digging his palms into his eyes. “We’ll do some more tests. Take some blood samples, but I imagine they’ll be just as inconclusive.”

—

Will looked at the smashed pictures, scratched out faces, and stains on the floor of the room. Scratches leading to under the bed- where the killer was waiting.

She can’t see faces… she didn’t know who she was with. Couldn’t trust that her friend was her friend...

Winston whined, and Phantom barked at the bed, the dogs staying on the edge of the room.

“It's Ten Thirty-Six. I’m in Greenwood, Delaware. My name is Will Graham.

He stopped, looking at the darkness under there, shining his flashlight on-

A girl. She hid herself further under the bed, and he knew he found the killer. She was sick. Like him. He got down slowly, trying to see under the bed, when it came tumbling on top of him. He got out of the way, and turned, reaching for her. He grabbed her arm, and the skin slid from her like a sleeve.

His phone was ringing, the dogs were barking and running after her, and he panicked-

He was in the woods, he still had his flashlight, but no longer had the skin, he started hyperventilating, and looked around the woods.

He checked his watch, and let out a heaving sob.

“It’s One-Seventeen AM.” His voice shook as he said the words, loudly into the woods. Phantom barked, somewhere close. “W-we’re in Greenwood, Delaware. And my name is Will Graham. And you’re alive.” He called out. “If you can hear me, you’re alive!” He shouted, hoping his voice would reach her.

Phantom came trotting back, sitting at his feet, and so did Winston after a couple whistles. He collapsed to the ground and pulled out his phone.

139 missed calls.

43 messages .

He let out a shaky laugh, and looked at the log, finding calls from Jack, Beverly, Alana, Hannibal-

His phone lit up again before he could check his messages, and he answered it before it could finish it's first ring.

“H-hello?”

“Will! Oh my god, where are you? What do you see?” Beverly's voice rang out clearly, fear heavy in her tone.

“I-I’m at the crime scene in Delaware.” He looked around. “Or the woods by it. I have my dogs, I-I lost time again.”

“I’m twenty minutes away, are you hurt? Can you hold on?”

“Yeah, I-I can. Please, come alone. I-I don’t know if I wanna trust anyone else with this.”

There was a shaky breath on the other side of the line. “Alright. I’ll let everyone know that you picked up, that you’re safe, and that I’m going to get you.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m gonna have to place you on hold for a bit, is that okay?”

“Y-yes.”

“Stay on the line Will. I’ll be right back.”

Beverly took a big breath as she dialed Hannibal, following her GPS instructions back to the crime scene. “Ms. Katz?”

“Hello Doctor Lecter, I found him.” She said, a bit of a laugh coming into her voice. “He said he lost time again, but I’m going to bring him home.”

“Is he there with you?”

“Not at the moment, but he said he has both his dogs.” She let out another sigh. “Would you mind calling everyone else? I wanna stay on a line with him.”

“Of course. Call me as soon as you are both home safe.”

“Will do.” She switched back to Will’s line, her expression one of concern. *Oh Will...*

___

She hung up just as she stepped out of her car, Will sitting with his dogs and twitching on the doorstep. He was sweaty and shaking, like he was after a bad nightmare, and she switched on her light just as he stood to hug her.

She shushed him gently, running her fingers through his hair, and looking around. “What was so important about me coming alone.”

“I’m not entirely sure what I saw was real.” His voice cracked, and Beverly held on a little tighter. She put pressure on his arms, the way she knew calmed her sister, and smiled at him reassuringly.

“Then let’s prove it.”

Inside, the bedroom was a mess.

“I grabbed her arm and an entire layer of dead skin separated from the underlying tissue... like she was wearing a glove.” Beverly nodded, looking at the overturned bed.

“That’s why she doesn’t bleed.”

Right, no circulation. There’s nothing alive in the tissue to bind it.”

“What did you do with it?”

Will blinked, and shook his head. “I blacked out, I don’t know.”

“Okay. Could be a severe staphylococcal infection. That, or leprosy.”

“Her eyes were discolored. She was malnourished. Jaundiced. Liver’s shutting down. She was… deranged.”

“So she mutilated a woman’s face because she thought it was a mask.”

“She can’t see faces. If she did kill Beth LeBeau, she might not even know she did it.”

“Then why did she come back?”

“To convince herself she didn’t.”

Beverly’s heart dropped to her stomach. ”Is that why you came back?”

“If I wasn’t clear on that issue, I know I didn’t kill Beth Lebeau. I just want to know who did.” His gaze was fixed on a point over her shoulder, and she sighed, glad he trusted her enough to know he didn’t have to fake eye contact.

“Me, too.” She took a few steps forward. “I’d say you met the killer here. We’ll get a team in tonight to look for the skin. I’m going to take you home.”

“Beverly, we should stay and look-”

“I know you don’t know if it really happened. You don’t trust yourself. I trust you. I trust what you say you’ve seen. Now let's go home, get a nice bath- Hot chocolate?” She smiled at him, putting a warm hand on his shoulder and leading him out. She watched as he got himself into the car, the dogs following, and called Jack.

—

Phantom followed Will in alone, Winston at his usual appointment with the trainer. Will tapped his knee as he waited, rubbing his eyes.

“Will.” Will looked up at Hannibal, dark circles heavy under his eyes.

“Doctor Lecter.”

Something in Hannibal’s face changed, and then he stepped aside. “Come in.”

Will stood, whistling once for Phantom to follow, and stepped into Hannibal’s office. Hannibal shut the door, and caught him around his waist, pulling him flush to Hannibal’s chest.

“I fear I’ve been neglectful in my worry.” Hannibal said, burying his face in Will’s hair and smelling.

Will sighed, melting into the hold. “It's okay. I’ve been kinda an ass lately too.”

Hannibal chuckled at the half-apology, and kissed his skull. “Stress bring out the worst in us. I want you to remember, Will, that I am on your side in this.”

Will nodded shakily, and Hannibal released him enough to turn in the hold, wrapping his arms around his neck.

“Will you humor me with another clock?”

Will snorted, and then walked over and sat down at Hannibal’s desk. “Paper and a pen?” Hannibal set his notebook in front of Will, handing him a pen. “It is Seven-O-Five. I’m in Baltimore, Maryland, and my name is Will Graham.”

“Thank you for humoring me.” Hannibal gave him a warm smile as he took the notebook, and Will again couldn’t read him at all. At least he was no longer getting the cold shoulder.

“I feel like I’m seeing a ghost.”

“Regarding this killer or yourself?”

“Both.”

“Well, she’s real. You know she’s real. There is evidence. When you saw her, your sanity did not leave you.”

“Time did.” Hannibal paused a moment, in tying up the notebook.

“I spoke to Dr. Sutcliffe. We briefly discussed the particulars of your visit. Would you like to discuss them with me?”

Will felt his lip curl. “There are no particulars. He didn’t find anything wrong.”

“Then we keep looking for answers.” Will sighed, looking away. “Perhaps you would permit me to run some tests of my own?”

Know your enemy. Right now, whether Hannibal realized how much, Will’s sate of sanity was the biggest danger to him. “You wouldn’t publish anything about me, would you, Dr. Lecter?” he teased, knowing the real reason for the tests.

“If there were ever anything that might be of therapeutic value to others, I’d abstract it in a form that’d be totally unrecognizable.”

He snorted. “Just do me a favor and publish it posthumously.”

“After your death or mine?”

Will gave a sad smile, looking Hannibal in the eye. “Whichever comes first.”

There was silence for a moment or two, and Will saw another chink appear, just a small one. Fear.

Hannibal broke eye contact. “Have you considered Cotard’s syndrome? It’s a rare delusional disorder in which a person believes he or she is dead.” He continued to do things around his office, avoiding Will’s eyes.

“Talking about the killer or me?” Will asked, spinning around in his chair.

“The killer, of course.”

“Oh, of course." Sarcasm again. "She couldn’t see the victim’s face. Or she was trying to uncover it.”

“The inability to identify others is associated with Cotard’s. It’s a misfiring in the areas of the brain which recognize faces, and also in the amygdala, which adds emotion to those recognitions. Even those closest to her could seem like imposters.”

“She reached out for help, someone she loved, someone she trusted. She felt betrayed, became violent.”

“She can’t trust anything or anyone she once knew to be trustworthy. Her mental illness won’t let her.” Will felt that hang in the air, the unspoken undertone of the words heavy on

his conscious. He reached out for Hannibal's hand, intertwining their fingers, and closed his eyes.

"You should tell Jack."

___

Two gunshots, loud and piercing through the veil of sleep, woke him. The front door was open, and he could see Bev in her sleep shirt in a firing position.

She turned back to him.

"I woke up to get a drink, came down and saw someone outside. By the time I grabbed my gun, they were too far away."

She came back in, grabbing the landline and punching in Jack's number. After she talked to him, she sat down next to Will.

"You looked like you were having a nightmare." She put an arm around his shoulders. "Are you okay?"

He nodded. "I'm fine."

"Your sheets are soaked, dude. Come up with me, we'll change them in the morning."

___

"They would say it was this or that, but they were always guessing. I did my own research, wrote down every word all those doctors would say, all the different terminology. Learned a lot but mostly what I learned was how little is actually known about mental illness. All they really know is it's rarely about finding solutions. It's mostly about managing expectations."

Will walked in on the end of Jack talking to Georgia's mother, the skin sample he pulled matching her daughter.

He finished up his interview, and she smiled at Will on the way out. Jack sighed, and motioned for Will to sit down.

"Managing your expectations?" He asked, the words laced with a bitter taste.

“Changing my expectations. You know, when Miriam Lass died, I had to come back here to this office to pack up. But that got to be so overwhelming I thought I should just leave seeing as how I got a trainee killed. That lack of leadership on my part, that was my responsibility.”

“You didn’t kill Miriam Lass. The Chesapeake Ripper did.” *Hannibal did.*

”Doesn’t feel that way to me. I pulled her out of a classroom like I pulled you out of the classroom.”

“She was a student. I’m- I was a teacher.”

“I’m still just as responsible for you as much as I was for her.”

“I’ll take my own responsibility.” *I don’t trust you with it.*

“Well not from me, you won’t. We can do that together.” Phantom growled, disliking how he raised his voice. “I broke the rules for Miriam Lass. I encouraged her to break the rules. I’m breaking the rules with you.”

“By allowing an unstable agent to do field work?”

“Special Agent.” Will rolled his eyes. “Meaning you still represent the F.B.I. You still represent me.”

“Have I misrepresented you, Jack?” The *audacity*-

“No, no but you’ve got me curious. Why are you still here? Why are you still here when you and I both know this is bad for you. You had an opportunity to quit. For some reason you didn’t take it.”

“Do you want me to quit?”

“I want you to know why I think you didn’t quit. You’re still here because what you do here has given you some sense of stability. That stability is good for you, Will.” Will wanted to laugh and scream. The stability he had came from the *Chesapeake Ripper* and this job was making him more and more unstable. He was still here for Hannibal. He had to keep himself in the FBI and still learning about the case or he would just be a nutjob with a pretty face.

“Stability requires a strong foundation, Jack. My moorings are built in the sand.”

“I am not sand. I am bedrock. When you doubt yourself, you don’t have to doubt me too.”

—

Will hugged his sides, shaking. Phantom and Winston were in another room luckily, so they were not hurt and would not need to be screened for evidence. He had lost time again… He

must have.

He had lost time and now a man was dead, and the FBI wasn't there yet.

He sat outside the office, the room where there was a dead body he couldn't say he didn't put there, and there was nothing to do but come clean and hope.

Beverly had piled her and the teams Jackets over his shoulders after she checked him over, hoping the weight would soothe him.

"You're clean. You couldn't have done this without getting something on you and there's nothing on you." She reassured him quietly.

"Murder weapon has the same diseased or damaged tissue on it that we found at Beth LeBeau's house." Jimmy made a funny face at Brian as he took the picture of the scissors.

"What connection does this guy have to the first victim?" Brian asked.

"Just me." Will raised his hands up a bit, before putting them back down.

"What do you remember?"

"I remember coming here. Going into the MRI, getting out... and finding Dr. Sutcliffe's body."

"No confusion?"

Will furrowed his brows. Jack was right, he was usually more out of it if he lost time. "Well, not that I'm aware of."

"Your Dr. Sutcliffe, does he usually see patients after hours when he's the only one in the office?"

"He was very accommodating. Hannibal referred me to him." Jack nodded.

"Georgia Madchen followed you here, and while you were ticking away in an MRI, she did this to your doctor. Why him?"

"She can't see faces- Maybe she thought he was me."

"Okay, while we're at it, why you?"

"I don't know, Jack. I have a habit of collecting strays. I told her- I tried to tell her, that night I saw her, I tried to tell her she was alive. Maybe she heard me. Maybe that hadn't occurred to her in a while."

—

Will spent the next day at home, lounging. He ignored everyone's calls, and Beverly let him just rest.

"It's gonna be a late night at the lab tonight, don't wait up for me, okay?" She smiled at him. He nodded, and she gave him a hug before walking out to get in her car.

Bear yipped at his heels, started to howl a bit when Will picked her up.

He worried about what she would find.

It was midnight, when Phantom started growling. Will woke up at the loud sound, the dogs all staring at something under the bed. The cats that were around were hissing, and Will found himself alone under the covers.

He peered down under the bed, leaning until he caught sight of Georgia, and at the confirmation rolled out and as far away as he could in the one movement,

He looked at her, scared under the covers, and smiled.

"I see you Georgia." She looked at him, unregnizing. "Think of who you are." He started crawling a little bit towards her, ever so slowly. "It's midnight. You're in Wolf Trap, Virginia. Your name is Georgia Madchen. You're not alone. We are here together."

She glanced up at the frame before looking back at Will.

"Am I alive?"

The words, tiny and quiet as she whispered them, so full of hope. She reached out, and he reached back, holding her hand on the floor.

"Yes. You are alive."

She smiled at him, and he smiled back.

Chapter End Notes

I love Beverly Katz so much??? Not to be gay, but I would die for her???

End Notes

This is my first ever fic, please let me know what you think! I had to beta myself, so let me know if you see any mistakes! Comments are appreciated, even just a key-smash makes my day!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!